A

FREE INQUIRY

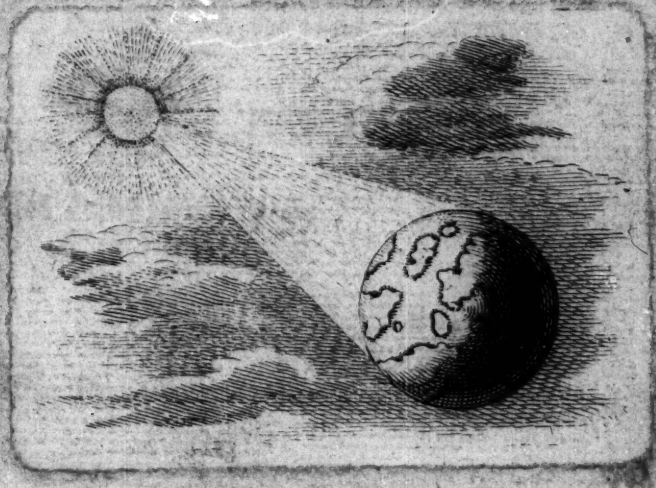
INTO THE

NATURE and ORIGIN

OF

EVIL.

In SIX LETTERS to ——:



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BRITISH MUSEUM

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LETTER I.

On EVIL in general.

SIR,

HAVING enjoy'd the pleaſure of many accidentalc onferences with you on metaphyſical, moral, political, and religious ſubjects; on which you ever ſeemed to converſe with more ſagacity, as well as more candor, than is uſual on the like occaſions; I imagin'd it might not be unentertaining either to you, or myſelf, to put together my ſentiments on theſe important topics, and communicate them to you from time to time as the abſence of buſineſs, or of more agree-

able amuſements may afford me opportunity. This I propoſe to do under the general title of an Inquiry into the Nature, and Origin of Evil; an Inquiry, which will comprehend them all, and which, I think, has never been attended to with that diligence it deſerves, nor with that ſucceſs, which might have been hoped for from that little that has been beſtow'd upon it. The right underſtanding of this abſtruſe ſpeculation, I look upon to be the only ſolid foundation, on which any rational ſyſtem of Ethicks can be built; for it ſeems impoſſible, that men ſhould ever arrive at any juſt ideas of their Creator, or his Attributes, any proper notions of their relation to him, or their duty to each other, without firſt ſettling in their minds ſome ſatisfactory ſolution of this important

tant queſtion, *Whence came Evil?* Whilſt we find ourſelves liable to innumerable miſeries in this life; apprehenſive of ſtill greater in another, and can give no probable account of this our wretched ſituation, what ſentiments muſt we entertain of the juſtice and benevolence of our Creator, who placed us in it, without our ſollicitations, or conſent? The works of the Creation ſufficiently demonſtrate his exiſtence, their beauty, perfection, and magnificence his infinite power, and wiſdom; but it is the Happineſs only, which we enjoy, or hope for, which can convince us of his Goodneſs.

It is the ſolution therefore of this important queſtion alone, that can aſcertain the moral Characteriſtic of God, and

upon that only muſt all human Virtue eternally depend.

If there's a Power above us,
(And that there is all Nature cries aloud
Thro' all her works) he muſt delight in Virtue,
And that, which he delights in, muſt be happy.

But ſhou'd this divine reaſoning of the philoſopher be at laſt inconcluſive; cou'd we once entertain ſuch blaſphemous notions of the Supreme Being, as that He might not delight in Virtue, neither adhere to it himſelf, nor reward it in others; that He could make any part of his creation miſerable, or ſuffer them to make themſelves ſo without a juſt cauſe, and a benevolent end; all moral conſiderations muſt be vain, and uſeleſs;

we

we can have no rule by which to direct our actions, nor, if we had, any kind of obligation to purſue it: nor in this caſe can any Revelation in the leaſt aſſiſt us, the belief of all Revelation being in its own nature ſubſequent, not only to the belief of God's exiſtence, but of his juſtice and veracity; for if God can injure us, he may alſo deceive us; and then there is an end of all diſtinctions between good and evil, truth and falſehood, and of all confidence in God or Man.

To find out therefore how Evil of any kind can be the production of infinite Goodneſs, joined with infinite Power, ſhould be the firſt ſtep in all our religious inquiries; the examination into which wonderful paradox will lead us

into many useful and sublime truths; and its perfect comprehension, was that possible for our narrow capacity, would, I doubt not, make as surprising discoveries in the Moral World, as mathematical and physical knowledge have in the Natural.

To clear up this difficulty, some ancient Philosophers have had recourse to the supposition of two first Causes, one Good, and the other Evil, perpetually counteracting each others designs. This system was afterwards adopted by the *Manichean* Heresy, and has since been defended by the ingenious *Monsr. Bayle*: but as the supposition of two first Causes is even in itself a contradiction, and as the whole scheme has been demonstrated by the best metaphysical Writers to be as

false

falſe as it is impious, all further arguments to diſprove it would be needleſs.

Others have endeavoured to account for this by the introduction of a Golden Age, or Paradiſaical State, in which all was innocence and happineſs.

Pœna metuſque aberant, nec verba minacia fixo
Ære legebantur, nec ſupplex turba timebant
Judicis ora ſui; ſed erant ſine vindice tuti.

When Man yet new,
No rule but uncorrupted Reaſon knew,
And with a native bent did Good purſue;
Unforc'd by puniſhment, unaw'd by fear,
His words were ſimple, and his ſoul ſincere:

Needleſs was written law, when none oppreſt,
The law of Man was written in his breaſt:
No ſuppliant crowds before the Judge appear'd,
No court erected yet, nor cauſe was heard,
But all was ſafe, for Conſcience was their Guard.

Ver erat æternum, placidiſque tepentibus auris
Mulcebant Zephyri natos ſine ſemine flores;
Mox etiam fruges tellus inarata ferebat,
Nec renovatus ager gravidis canebat ariſtis,
Flumina jam lactis, jam flumina nectaris ibant,
Flavaque de viridi ſtillabant ilice mella.

The flow'rs unſown in fields and meadows reign'd,
And Weſtern Winds immortal Spring maintain'd.

In

In following years the bearded corn enſu'd
From Earth unaſk'd, nor was that Earth renew'd.
From veins of valleys milk and nectar broke,
And honey ſweated from the pores of Oak.

Amuſing dreams! as abſurd in philoſophy, as in poetry delightful! For tho' it is probable, from the moſt ancient hiſtories, as well as from analogy drawn from the reſt of Nature's productions, that the World might be more happy and more innocent in its Infancy, than in more advanced Ages; yet that it cou'd ever be totally free from Vice and Miſery, may eaſily, I think, be proved impoſſible, both from the nature of this terreſtrial Globe, and the nature of its Inhabitants.

Inhabitants. So that theſe inchanting Scenes can in fact never have exiſted: but, if they had, the ſhort duration of this perfection is equally inconſiſtent with infinite Power, joined to infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs, as any original imperfection whatever. Fables then of this kind can never in the leaſt account for the Origin of Evil: they are all but mean expedients, which will never be able to take away the difficulty, and can at moſt but obſcure it, by ſhifting it a little backwards into a leſs clear light; like that *Indian* philoſophy, accounting for the ſupport of the World, which informs us, that it is ſuſtained by a vaſt Elephant, that Elephant by a Tortoiſe, and then prudently drops any further inquiry.

The

The Divines and Moraliſts of later Ages ſeem perfectly ſatisfied, that they have looſed this Gordian knot, by imputing the ſource of all Evil to the abuſe of Free-will in Created Beings. God, they ſay, never deſigned any ſuch thing ſhou'd exiſt as Evil, moral or natural; but that giving to ſome Beings, for good and wiſe purpoſes, a power of Free-agency, they perverted this power to bad ends, contrary to his intentions and commands; and thus their accidental wickedneſs produced conſequential Miſery. But to ſuppoſe in this manner, that God intended all things to be good and happy, and at the ſame time gave being to creatures able and willing to obſtruct his benevolent deſigns, is a notion ſo inconſiſtent with his wiſdom, good-

neſs,

neſs, omniſcience, and omnipotence, that it ſeems equally unphiloſophical, and more evidently abſurd, than the other. They have been led into this error by ridiculouſly judging of the diſpenſation of a Creator to his Creatures, by the ſame rules which they apply to the dealings of Men towards each other; between which there is not the leaſt proportion or ſimilitude. A Man who endeavours, to the utmoſt of his power, to make others virtuous and happy, however unſucceſsful, is ſufficiently juſtified; but in a Being omnipotent and omniſcient, the Cauſe of all cauſes, the Origin of all thought, will, and action; who ſees all things paſt, preſent, and to come, in one inſtantaneous view, the caſe is widely different; his active and permiſſive will muſt be exactly the ſame; and, in regard to him, all conſequential

ſequential and future Evils, thro' every moment of time, are actually preſent.

Since therefore none of theſe pretended ſolutions can, I am certain, give ſuch ſatisfaction to your comprehenſive underſtanding, let us now try to find out one more rational, and more conſiſtent with the analogy of every thing around us.

That there is a Supreme Being infinitely powerful, wiſe, and benevolent, the great Creator and Preſerver of all things, is a truth ſo clearly demonſtrated, that it ſhall be here taken for granted. That there is alſo in the univerſal ſyſtem of things, the work of his almighty hand, much miſery and wickedneſs, that is, much natural and moral Evil, is another truth, of which every

every hour's fatal experience cannot fail to convince us. How these two undoubted, yet seeming contradictory truths can be reconciled, that is, how Evils of any sort could have a place in the works of an omnipotent and good Being, is very difficult to account for. If we assert that he could not prevent them, we destroy his power; if that he would not, we arraign his goodness; and therefore his power and goodness cannot both be infinite.

But however conclusive this argument may seem, there is somewhere or other an error in it; and this error I take to arise from our wrong notions of omnipotence. Omnipotence cannot work contradictions, it can only effect all possible things. But so little are we acquainted

with

with the whole ſyſtem of Nature, that we know not what are poſſible, and what are not: but if we may judge from that conſtant mixture of pain with pleaſure, and inconvenience with advantage, which we muſt obſerve in every thing around us, we have reaſon to conclude, that to endue created Beings with perfection, that is, to produce Good excluſive of Evil, is one of thoſe impoſſibilities which even infinite Power cannot accompliſh.

The true ſolution then of this incomprehenſible paradox muſt be this, that all Evils owe their exiſtence ſolely to the neceſſity of their own natures, by which I mean they could not poſſibly have been prevented, without the loſs of ſome ſuperior Good, or the permiſſion of ſome greater Evil than themſelves; or that

many Evils will unavoidably inſinuate themſelves by the natural relations and circumſtances of things into the moſt perfect ſyſtem of Created Beings, even in oppoſition to the will of an almighty Creator, by reaſon they cannot be excluded without working contradictions; which not being proper objects of power, it is no diminution of omnipotence to affirm that it cannot effect them.

That the Almighty ſhould be thus limited, and circumſcribed by the nature of things, of which he himſelf is the Author, may to ſome ſeem not very intelligible: but ſurely it is not at all difficult to conceive, that in every poſſible method of ordering, diſpoſing, and framing the univerſal ſyſtem of things, ſuch numberleſs inconveniences might neceſſarily

neceſſarily ariſe, that all that infinite Power and Wiſdom could do, was to make choice of that method, which was attended with the leaſt and feweſt; and this not proceeding from any defect of power in the Creator, but from that imperfection which is inherent in the nature of all created things.

This neceſſity, I imagine, is what the Ancients meant by Fate, to which they fancied that *Jupiter*, and all the Gods, were obliged to ſubmit, and which was to be controuled by no power whatever. The *Stoicks* ſeem to have had ſome dark and unintelligible notions of this kind, which they neither underſtood themſelves, nor knew how to explain to others; that the untractableneſs of Matter was the cauſe of Evil; that God would have

made all things perfect, but that there was in Matter an evil biaſs repugnant to his benevolence, which drew another way, whence aroſe all manner of Evils. Of the like kind is a Maxim of the ſame Philoſophers, That Pain is no Evil; which, if aſſerted with regard to the individuals who ſuffer it, is downright nonſenſe; but if conſidered as it affects the univerſal Syſtem, is an undoubted truth, and means only that there is no more pain in it than what is neceſſary to the production of happineſs. How many ſoever of theſe Evils then force themſelves into the Creation, ſo long as the Good preponderates, it is a work well worthy of infinite Wiſdom and Benevolence; and, notwithſtanding the imperfections of its parts, the whole is moſt undoubtedly perfect.

Hence

Hence then we may plainly ſee, that much Evil may exiſt, not at all inconſiſtent with the power and goodneſs of God: and the further we purſue this clue, the more we ſhall at every ſtep diſcern new lights break out, which will diſcover clearly numberleſs examples, where the infinite power and goodneſs of God is fairly reconcileable with the miſery and wickedneſs of his Creatures, from the impoſſibility of preventing them; and if, in the very ſmall part of the univerſal Syſtem that lies within the reach of our imperfect capacities, many inſtances of this kind appear, in which they are viſibly conſiſtent, we ought with the utmoſt aſſurance to conclude, what is undoubtedly true, that they are really ſo in all, tho' we are not able to com-

prehend them. This is the kind of Faith moſt worthy of the human underſtanding, and moſt meritorious in the ſight of God, as it is the offspring of Reaſon, as well as the Parent of all Virtue, and reſignation to the juſt, but unſcrutable diſpenſations of Providence.

But, in order more clearly to explain this abſtruſe ſpeculation, it will be neceſſary to divide Evils into their different Species, and beſtow on each a ſeparate conſideration. This I ſhall do under the following heads: Evils of Imperfection, Natural Evils, Moral Evils, Political Evils, and Religious Evils; which, I think, will comprehend moſt of thoſe to which human Nature is unhappily liable. And now, Sir, leſt I ſhould add one more Evil to this melan-

choly

choly Catalogue, which is that of a long and tedious Epiſtle, I ſhall reſerve the examination into each of theſe particulars for the ſubject of a future Letter; and conclude this by aſſuring you, that I am,

SIR, &c.

LETTER II.

ON

EVILS of Imperfection.

LETTER II.

On Evils of Imperfection.

LETTER II.

SIR,

IN pursuance of my plan proposed in my last, I shall now proceed to examine into the Nature of each particular kind of Evil, and in the first place of those therein denominated Evils of Imperfection; which are in truth no Evils at all, but rather the absence of some compleative Good; and therefore I shall not have occasion to detain you long on this part of my subject.

LETTER II.

On Evils of Imperfection.

SIR,

IN purſuance of the plan propoſed in my laſt, I ſhall now proceed to examine into the Nature of each particular kind of Evil, and in the firſt place of thoſe therein denominated Evils of Imperfection; which are in truth no Evils at all, but rather the abſence of ſome comparative Good; and therefore I ſhall not have occaſion to detain you long on this part of my ſubject.

No

No System can possibly be formed, even in imagination, without a subordination of parts. Every animal body must have different members, subservient to each other; every picture must be composed of various colours, and of light and shade; all harmony must be formed of trebles, tenors, and basses; every beautiful and useful Edifice must consist of higher and lower, more and less magnificent apartments. This is in the very essence of all created things, and therefore cannot be prevented by any means whatever, unless by not creating them at all: for which reason, in the formation of the Universe, God was obliged, in order to carry on that just subordination so necessary to the very existence of the whole, to create Beings of different

ranks; and to beſtow on various ſpecies of animals, and alſo on the individuals of the ſame ſpecies, various degrees of underſtanding, ſtrength, beauty, and perfection; to the comparative want of which advantages we give the names of folly, weakneſs, deformity, and imperfection, and very unjuſtly repute them Evils: whereas in truth they are bleſſings as far as they extend, tho' of an inferior degree. They are no more actual Evils, than a ſmall eſtate is a real misfortune, becauſe many may be poſſeſſed of greater.

Whatever we enjoy, is purely a free gift from our Creator; but that we enjoy no more, can never ſure be deemed an injury, or a juſt reaſon to queſtion his infinite benevolence. All our happineſs

is

is owing to his goodneſs; but that it is no greater, is owing only to ourſelves, that is, to our not having any inherent right to any happineſs, or even to any exiſtence at all. This is no more to be imputed to God, than the wants of a beggar to the perſon who has relieved him: that he had ſomething, was owing to his Benefactor; but that he had no more, only to his own original Poverty.

They who look upon the privation of all the Good they ſee others enjoy, or think poſſible for infinite power to beſtow, as poſitive Evil, underſtand not that the Univerſe is a Syſtem whoſe very eſſence conſiſts in ſubordination; a ſcale of Beings deſcending by inſenſible degrees from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing: in which, tho' we may

juſtly

juſtly expect to find perfection in the whole, could we poſſibly comprehend it; yet would it be the higheſt abſurdity to hope for it in all its parts, becauſe the beauty and happineſs of the whole depend altogether on the juſt inferiority of its parts, that is, on the comparative imperfections of the ſeveral Beings of which it is compoſed.

It would have been no more an inſtance of God's wiſdom to have created no Beings but of the higheſt and moſt perfect order, than it would be of a painter's art, to cover his whole piece with one ſingle colour the moſt beautiful he could compoſe. Had he confined himſelf to ſuch, nothing could have exiſted but demi-gods, or archangels, and then all inferior orders muſt have been

void

void and uninhabited: but as it is surely more agreeable to infinite benevolence, that all these should be filled up with Beings capable of enjoying happiness themselves, and contributing to that of others, they must necessarily be filled with inferior Beings, that is, with such as are less perfect, but from whose existence, notwithstanding that less perfection, more felicity upon the whole accrues to the Universe, than if no such had been created. It is moreover highly probable, that there is such a connection between all ranks and orders by subordinate degrees, that they mutually support each other's existence, and every one in its place is absolutely necessary towards sustaining the whole vast and magnificent fabrick.

You

You ſee, therefore, that it is utterly impracticable, even for infinite power, to exclude from Creation this neceſſary inferiority of ſome Beings in compariſon with others. All that it can do is to make each as happy as their reſpective ſituations will permit: and this it has done in ſo extraordinary a manner, as to leave the benevolence of our great Creator not to be doubted of; for tho' he cannot make all ſuperior, or even equal, yet in the diſpenſations of his bleſſings his wiſdom and goodneſs both are well worthy the higheſt admiration; for, amongſt all the wide diſtinctions which he was obliged to make in the dignity and perfections of his Creatures, he has made much leſs in their happineſs than is uſually imagined, or indeed can be believed from outward appearances. He has given many ad-

vantages

vantages to Brutes, which Man cannot attain to with all his ſuperiority, and many probably to Man which are denied to Angels; amongſt which his ignorance is perhaps none of the leaſt. With regard to him, tho' it was neceſſary to the great purpoſes of human life to beſtow riches, underſtanding, and health, on individuals in very partial proportions; yet has the Almighty ſo contrived the nature of things, that happineſs is diſtributed with a more equal hand. His goodneſs, we may obſerve, is always ſtriving with theſe our neceſſary imperfections, ſetting bounds to the inconveniences it cannot totally prevent, by ballancing the wants, and repaying the ſufferings of all by ſome kind of equivalent naturally reſulting from their particular ſituations and circumſtances. Thus, for example,

example, poverty, or the want of riches, is generally compenſated by having more hopes, and fewer fears, by a greater ſhare of health, and a more exquiſite reliſh of the ſmalleſt enjoyments, than thoſe who poſſeſs them are uſually bleſs'd with. The want of taſte and genius, with all the pleaſures that ariſe from them, are commonly recompenced by a more uſeful kind of common ſenſe, together with a wonderful delight, as well as ſucceſs, in the buſy purſuits of a ſcrambling World. The ſufferings of the Sick are greatly relieved by many trifling gratifications imperceptible to others, and ſometimes almoſt repaid by the inconceivable tranſports occaſioned by the return of health and vigour. Folly cannot be very grievous, becauſe imperceptible; and I doubt not but there is ſome truth in that

rant of a mad Poet, that there is a pleaſure in being mad, which none but Madmen know. Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life, is the only opiate capable of infuſing that inſenſibility which can enable them to endure the miſeries of the one, and the fatigues of the other. It is a cordial adminiſtered by the gracious hand of Providence, of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged and improper Education. It is the baſis of all ſubordination, the ſupport of ſociety, and the privilege of individuals: and I have ever thought it a moſt remarkable inſtance of the Divine Wiſdom, that whereas in all animals, whoſe individuals riſe little above the reſt of their ſpecies, knowledge is inſtinctive; in Man, whoſe individuals

individuals are ſo widely different, it is acquired by Education; by which means the Prince and the Labourer, the Philoſopher and the Peaſant, are in ſome meaſure fitted for their reſpective ſituations. The ſame parental care extends to every part of the animal creation. Brutes are exempted from numberleſs anxieties, by that happy want of reflexion on paſt, and apprehenſion of future ſufferings, which are annexed to their inferiority. Thoſe amongſt them who devour others, are taught by Nature to diſpatch them as eaſily as poſſible; and Man, the moſt mercileſs devourer of all, is induced, by his own advantage, to feaſt thoſe deſigned for his ſuſtenance, the more luxuriouſly to feaſt upon them himſelf. Thus Miſery, by all poſſible methods, is diminiſhed or repaid; and Happineſs, like

fluids, is ever tending towards an Equilibrium.

But was it ever ſo unequally divided, our pretence for complaint could be of this only, that we are not ſo high in the ſcale of exiſtence as our ignorant ambition may deſire; a pretence which muſt eternally ſubſiſt; becauſe, were we ever ſo much higher, there would be ſtill room for infinite power to exalt us; and ſince no link in the chain can be broke, the ſame reaſon for diſquiet muſt remain to thoſe who ſucceed to that chaſm, which muſt be occaſioned by our preferment. A Man can have no reaſon to repine, that he is not an Angel; nor a Horſe, that he is not a Man; much leſs, that in their ſeveral ſtations they poſſeſs not the faculties of another; for

this

this would be an insufferable misfortune. And doubtless it would be as inconvenient for a Man to be endued with the knowledge of an Angel, as for a Horse to have the reason of a Man; but, as they are now formed by the consummate wisdom of their Creator, each enjoys pleasures peculiar to his situation: and tho' the happiness of one may perhaps consist in divine Contemplation, of another in the acquisition of wealth and power, and that of a third in wandering amidst limpid streams, and luxuriant pastures; yet the meanest of these enjoyments give no interruption to the most sublime, but altogether undoubtedly increase the aggregate sum of felicity bestowed upon the universe. Greatly indeed must that be lessened, were there no Beings but of the highest orders. Did there not, for instance, exist on this ter-

reſtrial Globe any ſenſitive creatures inferior to Man, how great a quantity of happineſs muſt have been loſt, which is now enjoy'd by millions, who at preſent inhabit every part of its ſurface, in fields and gardens, in extended deſarts, impenetrable woods, and immenſe oceans; by monarchies of Bees, republics of Ants, and innumerable families of inſects dwelling on every leaf and flower, who are all poſſeſſed of as great a ſhare of pleaſure, and a greater of innocence, than their arrogant Sovereign, and at the ſame time not a little contribute to his convenience and happineſs?

Has God, thou Fool, work'd ſolely for thy good!
Thy joy, thy paſtime, thy attire, thy food!

Who

Who for thy table feeds the wanton
Fawn,
For him as kindly ſpreads the flow'ry
lawn.
Is it for thee the Lark aſcends and ſings?
Joy tunes his voice, joy elevates his
wings.
Is it for thee the Linnet pours his throat?
Loves of his own, and raptures, ſwell
the note.
The bounding Steed you pompouſly
beſtride,
Shares with his Lord the pleaſure and
the pride.
Is thine alone the ſeed that ſtrews the
plain?
The birds of Heav'n ſhall vindicate their
grain.
Thine the full harveſt of the Golden
Year?
Part pays, and juſtly, the deſerving
Steer.

POPE.

Thus the Universe resembles a large and well-regulated Family, in which all the officers and servants, and even the domestic animals, are subservient to each other in a proper subordination: each enjoys the privileges and perquisites peculiar to his place, and at the same time contributes by that just subordination to the magnificence and happiness of the whole.

It is evident, therefore, that these Evils of Imperfection, proceeding from the necessary inferiority of some Beings in comparison of others, can in no sense be called any Evils at all: but, if they could, it is as evident from thence, that there are many which even infinite Power cannot prevent; it being sufficiently demonstrable, that to produce a system of

created

created Beings, all ſupreme in happineſs and dignity, a government compoſed of all Kings, an army of all Generals, or a univerſe of all Gods, muſt be impracticable for Omnipotence itſelf.

We have here then made a large ſtride towards our intended Goal, having at once acquitted the Divine Goodneſs, and freed Mankind from a numerous train of imaginary Evils, by moſt clearly ſhewing them to be no Evils at all; and yet under this head are really comprehended all the Evils we perpetually complain of, except actual pain: the nature of which, and how it came to have a place in the works of an omnipotent and good Being, ſhall be conſidered in the next Letter from,

SIR, &c.

LET-

LETTER III.

ON

NATURAL EVILS.

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I Shall now lay before you my free sentiments concerning the Origin of Natural Evils, by which I understand the sufferings of sensitive Beings only; for tempests, inundations, and earthquakes, with all the disorders of the material World, are no further Evils than as they affect the sentient: to that under this head can be only comprehended pains of body, and uneasiness of mind. That these are real Evils, I readily acknowledge; and if any one is philosophical enough

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SIR,

I Shall now lay before you my free ſentiments concerning the Origin of Natural Evils, by which I underſtand the ſufferings of ſenſitive Beings only; for tempeſts, inundations, and earthquakes, with all the diſorders of the material World, are no farther Evils than as they affect the ſenſitive: ſo that under this head can be only comprehended pains of body, and inquietudes of mind. That theſe are real Evils, I readily acknowledge; and if any one is philoſpher enough

enough to doubt of it, I ſhall only beg leave to refer him to a ſevere fit of ſickneſs, or a tedious law-ſuit, for farther ſatisfaction.

The production of Happineſs ſeems to be the only motive that could induce infinite Goodneſs to exert infinite Power to create all things: for, to ſay truth, Happineſs is the only thing of real value in exiſtence; neither riches, nor power, nor wiſdom, nor learning, nor ſtrength, nor beauty, nor virtue, nor religion, nor even life itſelf, being of any importance but as they contribute to its production. All theſe are in themſelves neither Good nor Evil; Happineſs alone is their great end, and they deſirable only as they tend to promote it. Moſt aſtoniſhing therefore it muſt appear to every one who looks

looks round him, to obſerve all creatures bleſs'd with life and ſenſation, that is, all creatures made capable of Happineſs, at the ſame time by their own natures condemned to innumerable and unavoidable miſeries. Whence can it proceed, that Providence ſhould thus ſeem to counteract his own benevolent intentions? To what ſtrange and inviſible cauſe are all theſe numerous and invincible Evils indebted for their Exiſtence? If God is a good and benevolent Being, what end could he propoſe from creation, but the propagation of Happineſs? and if Happineſs is the end of all exiſtence, why are not all creatures that do exiſt happy?

The true ſolution of this important queſtion, ſo long and ſo vainly ſearched for by the philoſophers of all ages and

all

all countries, I take to be at laſt no more than this, That theſe real Evils proceed from the ſame ſource as thoſe imaginary ones of Imperfection before treated of, namely, from that ſubordination, without which no created ſyſtem can ſubſiſt; all ſubordination implying Imperfection, all Imperfection Evil, and all Evil ſome kind of inconvenience or ſuffering: ſo that there muſt be particular inconveniences and ſufferings annexed to every particular rank of created Beings by the circumſtances of things, and their modes of exiſtence. Moſt of thoſe to which we ourſelves are liable may be eaſily ſhewn to be of this kind, the effects only of human nature, and the ſtation Man occupies in the univerſe: and therefore their Origin is plainly deducible from neceſſity; that is, they could not have been prevented

without

without the loſs of greater good, or the admiſſion of greater Evils than themſelves; or by not creating any ſuch creatures as Men at all. And tho' this, upon a general view of things, does not ſo forcibly ſtrike us; yet, on a more minute inſpection into every grievance attendant on human nature, it will moſt evidently appear. Moſt of theſe, I think, may be comprehended under the following heads: poverty, labour, inquietudes of mind, pains of body, and death; from none of which we may venture to affirm Man could ever have been exempted, ſo long as he continued to be Man. God indeed might have made us quite other creatures, and placed us in a world quite differently conſtituted; but then we had been no longer Men; and whatever Beings had occupied our ſta-

tions in the universal System, they must have been liable to the same inconveniences.

Poverty, for example, is what all could not possibly have been exempted from, not only by reason of the fluctuating nature of human possessions, but because the world could not subsist without it; for had all been rich, none could have submitted to the commands of another, or the necessary drudgeries of life; thence all governments must have been dissolved, arts neglected, and lands uncultivated, and so an universal penury have overwhelmed all, instead of now and then pinching a few. Hence, by the by, appears the great excellence of Charity, by which Men are enabled by a particular distribution of the blessings and enjoy-

ments of life, on proper occaſions to prevent that poverty which by a general one Omnipotence itſelf could never have prevented: ſo that, by inforcing this duty, God as it were demands our aſſiſtance to promote univerſal happineſs, and to ſhut out Miſery at every door, where it ſtrives to intrude itſelf.

Labour indeed God might eaſily have excuſed us from, ſince at his command the Earth would readily have poured forth all her treaſures without our inconſiderable aſſiſtance: but if the ſevereſt Labour cannot ſufficiently ſubdue the malignity of human nature, what plots and machinations, what wars, rapine, and devaſtation, what profligacy and licentiouſneſs, muſt have been the conſequences of univerſal idleneſs! So that

Labour ought only to be looked upon as a task kindly impoſed upon us by our indulgent Creator, neceſſary to preſerve our health, our ſafety, and our innocence.

Inquietudes of mind cannot be prevented without firſt eradicating all our inclinations and paſſions, the winds and tides that preſerve the great Ocean of human life from perpetual ſtagnation. So long as Men have purſuits, they muſt meet with diſappointments; and whilſt they have diſappointments, they muſt be diſquieted; whilſt they are injured, they muſt be inflamed with anger; and whilſt they ſee cruelties, they muſt be melted with pity; whilſt they perceive danger, they muſt be ſenſible of fear; and whilſt they behold beauty, they muſt be in-

ſlaved by Love: nor can they be exempted from the various anxieties attendant on theſe various and turbulent paſſions. Yet without them we ſhould be undoubtedly leſs happy and leſs ſafe; for without anger we ſhould not defend ourſelves, and without pity we ſhould not aſſiſt others; without fear we ſhould not preſerve our lives, and without love they would not be worth preſerving.

Pains of body are perhaps but the neceſſary conſequences of the union of material and ſpiritual eſſences; for matter being by nature diviſible, when endued with ſenſibility, muſt probably be affected by pains and pleaſures by its different modifications: wherefore, to have been freed from our ſufferings, we muſt have been deprived of all our ſenſual en-

joyments; a compoſition by which few ſurely would be gainers. Beſides, the pains of our bodies are neceſſary to make us continually mindful of their preſervation; for what numberleſs lives would be loſt by neglect in every trifling purſuit, or flung away in ill humour, was the piercing of a ſword no more painful than the tickling of a feather?

Death, the laſt and moſt dreadful of all Evils, is ſo far from being one, that it is the infallible cure for all others.

To die, is landing on ſome ſilent ſhore,
Where billows never beat, nor tempeſts roar.
Ere well we feel the friendly ſtroke, 'tis o'er. GARTH.

For, abſtracted from the ſickneſs and ſufferings uſually attending it, it is no more

more than the expiration of that term of life, God was pleaſed to beſtow on us, without any claim or merit on our part. But was it an Evil ever ſo great, it could not be remedied but by one much greater, which is by living for ever; by which means our wickedneſs, unreſtrained by the proſpect of a future ſtate, would grow ſo inſupportable, our ſufferings ſo intolerable by perſeverance, and our pleaſures ſo tireſome by repetition, that no Being in the Univerſe could be ſo compleatly miſerable as a ſpecies of immortal Men. We have no reaſon therefore to look upon Death as an Evil, or to fear it as a puniſhment, even without any ſuppoſition of a future life: but if we conſider it as a paſſage to a more perfect ſtate, or a remove only in an eternal ſucceſſion of ſtill improving ſtates (for which we have

the ſtrongeſt reaſons) it will then appear a new favour from the divine munificence; and a man muſt be as abſurd to repine at dying, as a traveller would be, who propoſed to himſelf a delightful tour thro' various unknown countries, to lament that he cannot take up his reſidence at the firſt dirty Inn which he baits at on the road. The inſtability of human life, or the haſty changes of its ſucceſſive periods, of which we ſo frequently complain, are no more than the neceſſary progreſs of it to this neceſſary concluſion; and are ſo far from being Evils deſerving theſe complaints, that they are the ſource of our greateſt pleaſures, as they are the ſource of all novelty, from which our greateſt pleaſures are ever derived. The continual ſucceſſion of Seaſons in the human life, by daily preſenting

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to us new ſcenes, render it agreeable, and, like thoſe of the year, afford us delights by their change, which the choiceſt of them could not give us by their continuance. In the Spring of Life, the gilding of the ſunſhine, the verdure of the fields, and the variegated paintings of the Sky, are ſo exquiſite in the Eyes of Infants at their firſt looking abroad into a new World, as nothing perhaps afterwards can equal. The heat and vigour of the ſucceeding Summer of Youth ripens for us new pleaſures, the blooming maid, the nightly revel, and the jovial chace: the ſerene Autumn of compleat Manhood feaſts us with the golden harveſt of our worldly purſuits: nor is the hoary Winter of old age deſtitute of its peculiar comforts and enjoyments, of which the recollection and relation of

thoſe

thoſe paſt are perhaps none of the leaſt; and at laſt Death opens to us a new proſpect, from whence we ſhall probably look back upon the diverſions and occupations of this world with the ſame contempt we do now on our Tops and Hobby-horſes, and with the ſame ſurpriſe, that they could ever ſo much entertain or engage us.

Thus we ſee all theſe Evils could never have been prevented even by infinite Power, without the introduction of greater, or the loſs of ſuperior good, they being but the neceſſary conſequences of human Nature; from which it can no more be diveſted, than matter from extenſion, or heat from motion, which proceed from the very modes of their exiſtence.

If

If it be objected, that, after all that has been ſaid, there are innumerable miſeries entailed upon all things that have life, and particularly on Man; many diſeaſes of the body, and afflictions of mind, in which Nature ſeems to play the Tyrant, ingenious in contriving torments for her children; that we cannot avoid ſeeing every moment with horror numbers of our fellow-creatures condemned to tedious and intolerable miſeries, ſome expiring on racks, others roaſting in flames, ſome ſtarving in dungeons, others raving in mad houſes; ſome broiling in fevers, others groaning whole months under the exquiſite tortures of gout and ſtone. If it be ſaid further, that ſome men being exempted from many calamities with which others are afflicted, proves plainly that all might

have

have been exempted from all, the charge can by no means be disputed, nor can it be alledged that infinite Power could not have prevented most of these dreadful calamities. From hence therefore I am persuaded, that there is something in the abstract nature of pain conducive to pleasure; that the sufferings of individuals are absolutely necessary to universal happiness; and that, from connections to us inconceivable, it was impracticable for Omnipotence to produce the one, without at the same time permitting the other. Their constant and uniform concomitancy thro' every part of Nature with which we are acquainted, very much corroborates this conjecture, in which scarce one instance, I believe, can be produced of the acquisition of pleasure or convenience by any creatures, which is

not

not purchaſed by the previous or conſequential ſufferings of themſelves or others; pointing out, as it were, that a certain allay of pain muſt be caſt into the univerſal maſs of created Happineſs, and inflicted ſomewhere for the benefit of the whole. Over what mountains of ſlain is every mighty Empire rolled up to the ſummit of Proſperity and Luxury, and what new ſcenes of deſolation attend its fall? To what infinite toil of Men, and other animals, is every flouriſhing City indebted for all the conveniences and enjoyments of Life, and what vice and miſery do thoſe very enjoyments introduce? The pleaſures peculiar to the continuing our ſpecies are ſeverely paid for by pains and perils in one Sex, and by cares and anxieties in both. Thoſe annexed to the preſervation of ourſelves are both preceded and followed by numberleſs ſufferings,

ferings; preceded by the maſſacres and tortures of various animals preparatory to a feaſt, and followed by as many diſeaſes lying wait in every diſh to pour forth vengeance on their deſtroyers. Our riches and honours are acquired by laborious or perilous occupations, and our ſports are purſued with ſcarce leſs fatigue or danger, and uſually attended with the diſtreſſes and deſtruction of innocent animals. This univerſal connection of pain with pleaſure ſeems, I think, ſtrongly to intimate, that pain abſtractedly conſidered muſt have its uſes; and ſince we may be aſſured, that it is never admitted but with the reluctance of the ſupreme Author, thoſe uſes muſt be of the higheſt importance, tho' we have no faculties to conceive them.

The

The human mind can comprehend but a very ſmall part of the great and aſtoniſhing whole: for any thing we know, the ſufferings (and perhaps the crimes producing thoſe ſufferings) of the Inhabitants of this terreſtrial Globe may ſome way or other affect thoſe of the moſt diſtant planet, and the whole animal world may be connected by ſome principle as general as that of attraction in the corporeal, and ſo the miſeries of particular Beings be ſome way neceſſary to the happineſs of the whole. How theſe things operate, is indeed to us quite inconceivable; but that they do operate in ſome ſuch extenſive manner is far, I think, from improbable.

All Ages and Nations ſeem to have had confuſed notions of the merits of ſufferings

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ſufferings abſtracted from their tendency to any viſible good, and have paid the higheſt honours to thoſe who have voluntarily endured them, as to their common benefactors. Many in Chriſtian Countries have formerly been fainted for long faſting, for whipping or tormenting themſelves, for ſitting whole years in uneaſy poſtures, or expoſing themſelves to the inclemency of the weather on the tops of pillars. Many at this day in the Eaſt are almoſt deified for loading themſelves with heavy chains, bending under burthens, or confining themſelves in chains ſtuck round with pointed nails. Now, if theſe notions are not totally devoid of all reaſon and common ſenſe, (and few, I believe, are ſo which become univerſal) they can be founded on no other principle than this, of the neceſſity

ceſſity of pain to produce happineſs, which ſeems another weighty inſtance of the probability of this ancient and univerſal opinion, tho' the reaſons for it are forgot and unknown, and the practices derived from it big with the moſt abſurd and ridiculous ſuperſtitions.

One cauſe, I think, from which many of our ſevereſt ſufferings may be derived, may be diſcovered by analogical reaſoning, that is, by aſſimilating thoſe things which are not objects of our underſtandings, to others which lye within their reach. Man is one link of that vaſt Chain, deſcending by inſenſible degrees from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing. As there are many thouſands below him, ſo muſt there be many more above him. If we look downwards, we

ſee innumerable ſpecies of inferior Beings, whoſe happineſs and lives are dependent on his will; we ſee him cloathed by their ſpoils, and fed by their miſeries and deſtruction, inſlaving ſome, tormenting others, and murdering millions for his luxury or diverſion; is it not therefore analogous and highly probable, that the happineſs and life of Man ſhould be equally dependent on the wills of his ſuperiors? As we receive great part of our pleaſures, and even ſubſiſtence, from the ſufferings and deaths of lower animals, may not theſe ſuperior Beings do the ſame from ours, and that by ways as far above the reach of the moſt exalted human underſtandings, as the means by which we receive our benefits are above the capacities of the meaneſt creatures deſtined for our ſervice? The

fundamental

fundamental Error in all our reaſonings on this ſubject, is that of placing ourſelves wrong in that preſumptuous climax of Beaſt, Man, and God; from whence, as we ſuppoſe falſely, that there is nothing above us except the Supreme Being, we fooliſhly conclude that all the Evils we labour under muſt be derived immediately from his omnipotent hand; whereas there may be numberleſs intermediate Beings, who have power to deceive, torment, or deſtroy us, for the ends only of their own pleaſure or utility, who may be veſted with the ſame privileges over their inferiors, and as much benefited by the uſe of them, as ourſelves. In what manner theſe benefits accrue to them, it is impoſſible for us to conceive; but that impoſſibility leſſens not the probability of this conjecture,

which by Analogy is ſo ſtrongly confirmed.

Should you, Sir, have been lately employed in reading ſome of thoſe ſublime Authors, who, from pride and ignorance, delight to puff up the dignity of human Nature, the notions here advanced may appear to you abſurd and incredible, becauſe inconſiſtent with that imaginary dignity; and you may object, that it is impoſſible that God ſhould ſuffer innocence to be thus afflicted, and reaſon thus deceived; that tho' he may permit animals made ſolely for the uſe of Man to be thus abuſed for his convenience or recreation; yet that Man himſelf, the ſole poſſeſſor of reaſon, the Lord of this terreſtrial globe, his own ambaſſador, vicegerent, and ſimilitude, ſhould

be

be thus dependent on the will of others, muſt be utterly inconſiſtent with the divine Wiſdom and Juſtice. But pray, Sir, what does all this prove, but the importance of a Man to himſelf? Is not the juſtice of God as much concerned to preſerve the happineſs of the meaneſt Inſect which he has called into being, as of the greateſt Man that ever lived? Are not all creatures we ſee made ſubſervient to each others uſes? and what is there in Man, that he only ſhould be exempted from this common fate of all created Beings? The ſuperiority of Man to that of other terreſtrial animals is, as inconſiderable, in proportion to the immenſe plan of univerſal Exiſtence, as the difference of climate between the north and ſouth end of the paper I now write upon, with regard to the heat and diſtance of the Sun.

There is nothing leads us into so many Errors concerning the works and designs of Providence, as that foolish vanity that can persuade such insignificant creatures that all things were made for their service; from whence they ridiculously set up Utility to themselves as the Standard of Good, and conclude every thing to be Evil which appears injurious to them or their purposes. As well might a nest of Ants imagine this Globe of Earth created only for them to cast up into hillocks, and cloathed with grain and herbage for their sustenance; then accuse their Creator for permitting spades to destroy them, and plows to lay waste their habitations; the inconviences of which they feel, but are utterly unable to comprehend their uses, as well as the relations they themselves bear to superior Beings.

It is ſurpriſing that none of thoſe Philoſophers, who were drove to the ſuppoſition of two firſt Cauſes, and many other abſurdities, to account for the Origin of Evil, ſhould not rather have choſen to impute it to the miniſtration of intermediate Beings; and, when they ſaw the happineſs of all inferior animals dependent on our wills, ſhould not have concluded, that the good order and well-being of the Univerſe might require, that ours ſhould be as dependent on the wills of ſuperior Beings, accountable like ourſelves to one common Lord and Father of all things. This is the more wonderful, becauſe the exiſtence and influence of ſuch Beings has been an article in the Creed of all Religions that have ever appeared in the World. In the beautiful ſyſtem of the Pagan theo-

logy, their Sylvan and Houſhold Deities, their Nymphs, Satyrs, and Fawns, were of this kind. All the barbarous nations that have ever been diſcovered, have been found to believe and adore intermediate ſpiritual Beings, both good and evil. The Jewiſh religion not only confirms the belief of their exiſtence, but of their tempting, deceiving, and tormenting mankind; and the whole ſyſtem of Chriſtianity is erected entirely on this foundation.

Thus, Sir, you ſee the good order of the whole, and the happineſs it receives from a proper ſubordination, will ſufficiently account for the ſufferings of individuals; and all ſuch ſhould be conſidered but as the neceſſary taxes, which every member of this great Republick of

the Univerſe is obliged to pay towards the ſupport of the community. It is no derogation from the divine Goodneſs, that theſe taxes are not always impoſed equally in the preſent ſtate of things; becauſe as every individual is but a part of the great whole, ſo is the preſent ſtate but a part of a long, or perhaps an eternal ſucceſſion of others; and, like a ſingle day in the natural life, has reference to many more, both paſt and to come. It is but as a page in a voluminous accompt, from which no judgment can be formed on the ſtate of the whole: but of this we may be aſſured, that the ballance will ſome time or other be ſettled with juſtice and impartiality. The certainty therefore of a future ſtate, in which we, and indeed all Creatures endued with ſenſation, ſhall ſome how or

other

other exiſtence ſeems (if all our notions of Juſtice are not erroneous) as demonſtrable as the Juſtice of their Creator; for if he is juſt, all ſuch Creatures muſt have their account of happineſs and miſery ſome where adjuſted with equity, and all Creatures capable of virtue and vice muſt, according to their behaviour, receive rewards and puniſhments; and, to render theſe puniſhments conſiſtent with infinite goodneſs, they muſt not only be proportioned to their crimes, but alſo ſome way neceſſary to univerſal Good; for no Creatures can be called out of their primitive nothing by an all-wiſe and benevolent Creator, to be loſers by their exiſtence, or to be made miſerable for no beneficial end, even by their own miſbehaviour: ſo that all future miſery, as well as preſent, muſt be ſubſervient

to

to happiness, or otherwise infinite Power, joined with infinite Goodness, would have prevented both vice and punishment.

For this reason, amongst all the short-sighted conjectures of Man into the dispensations of Providence and a future State, the ancient doctrine of Transmigration seems the most rational and most consistent with his wisdom and goodness; as by it all the unequal dispensations of things so necessary in one Life may be set right in another, and all creatures serve the highest and lowest, the most eligible and most burthensome offices of life by an equitable kind of rotation; by which means their rewards and punishments may not only be well proportioned to their behaviour, but also subservient towards

towards carrying on the buſineſs of the Univerſe, and thus at the ſame time anſwer the purpoſes both of juſtice and utility. But the pride of Man will not ſuffer us to treat this ſubject with the ſeriouſneſs it deſerves; but rejects as both impious and ridiculous every ſuppoſition of inferior creatures ever arriving at its own imaginary dignity, allowing at the ſame time the probability of human Nature being exalted to the angelick, a much wider and more extraordinary tranſition, but yet ſuch a one as may probably be the natural conſequence, as well as the reward of a virtuous life; nor is it leſs likely that our vices may debaſe us to the ſervile condition of inferior animals, in whoſe forms we may be ſeverely puniſhed for the injuries we have done to Mankind when amongſt them, and be

obliged

obliged in ſome meaſure to repair them, by performing the drudgeries tyrannically impoſed upon us for their ſervice.

From what has been ſaid, I think, it plainly appears that numberleſs Evils do actually exiſt, which could not have been excluded from the works of infinite goodneſs even by infinite power; and from hence it may be concluded, that there are none which could; but that God has exerted all his omnipotence to introduce all poſſible happineſs, and, as far as the imperfection of created things would permit, to exclude all miſery, that is, all natural Evil, from the univerſal ſyſtem; which notwithſtanding will introduce itſelf in many circumſtances, even in oppoſition to infinite Power.

The

The Origin of Moral Evil lies much deeper, and I will venture to aſſert has never yet been fathomed by the ſhort line of human underſtanding. That I ſhall be able to reach it, I have by no means the vanity to imagine: but, laying aſide all preconceived opinions and ſyſtematical prejudice, I will in my next endeavour to come as near it as lies in the power of,

SIR, &c.

LET-

LETTER IV.

ON

MORAL EVIL.

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On Moral Evil.

SIR,

I Muſt now leave that plain and eaſy road thro' which I have hitherto conducted you, and carry you thro' unfrequented paths, and ways untrodden by philoſophical feet. Already, I think, the exiſtence of Natural Evil has been ſufficiently accounted for, without any derogation from the power, wiſdom, or goodneſs of God. What next remains to be cleared up, is the Origin of Moral Evil; which, conſiſtently with the ſame Divine Attributes, I have never ſeen ac-

counted for by any Author, ancient or modern, in a manner that could give tolerable satisfaction to a rational Inquirer. Nor indeed can this be ever effectually performed, without at the same time taking into consideration all those most abstruse speculations concerning the nature of Virtue, Free-will, Fate, Grace, and Predestination, the debates of ages, and matter of innumerables folios. To attempt this, therefore, in the compass of a Letter, would be the highest presumption, did not I well know the clear and ready comprehension of the person to whom it is addressed; and also, that the most difficult of these kinds of disquisitions are usually better explained in a few lines, than by a thousand pages.

In

In order therefore to find out the true Origin of Moral Evil, it will be neceſſary, in the firſt place, to inquire into its nature and eſſence; or what it is that conſtitutes one action Evil, and another Good. Various have been the opinions of various Authors on this Criterion of Virtue; and this variety has rendered that doubtful, which muſt otherwiſe have been clear and manifeſt to the meaneſt capacity. Some indeed have denied that there is any ſuch thing, becauſe different ages and nations have entertained different ſentiments concerning it: but this is juſt as reaſonable as to aſſert, that there are neither Sun, Moon, nor Stars, becauſe Aſtronomers have ſupported different ſyſtems of the motions and magnitudes of theſe celeſtial bodies. Some have placed it in conformity to truth,

ſome to the fitneſs of things, and others to the will of God. But all this is merely ſuperficial: they reſolve us not why truth, or the fitneſs of things, are either eligible or obligatory, or why God ſhould require us to act in one manner rather than another. The true reaſon of which can poſſibly be no other than this, becauſe ſome actions produce happineſs, and others miſery: ſo that all Moral Good and Evil are nothing more than the production of Natural. This alone it is that makes truth preferable to falſehood, this that determines the fitneſs of things, and this that induces God to command ſome actions, and forbid others. They who extol the truth, beauty, and harmony of Virtue, excluſive of its conſequences, deal but in pompous nonſenſe; and they who would perſuade us, that Good and

Evil

Evil are things indifferent, depending wholly on the will of God, do but confound the nature of things, as well as all our notions of God himſelf, by repreſenting him capable of willing contradictions; that is, that we ſhould be, and be happy, and at the ſame time that we ſhould torment and deſtroy each other; for injuries cannot be made benefits, pain cannot be made pleaſure, and conſequently vice cannot be made virtue by any power whatever. It is the conſequences therefore of all human actions that muſt ſtamp their value. So far as the general practice of any action tends to produce Good, and introduce happineſs into the world, ſo far we may pronounce it virtuous; ſo much Evil as it occaſions, ſuch is the degree of vice it contains. I ſay the general practice, becauſe we muſt al-

ways remember in judging by this rule, to apply it only to the general ſpecies of actions, and not to particular actions; for the infinite wiſdom of God, deſirous to ſet bounds to the deſtructive conſequences which muſt otherwiſe have followed from the univerſal depravity of mankind, has ſo wonderfully contrived the nature of things, that our moſt vitious actions may ſometimes accidentally and collaterally produce Good. Thus, for inſtance, robbery may diſperſe uſeleſs hoards to the benefit of the publick; Adultery may bring heirs, and good-humour too, into many families, where they would otherwiſe have been wanting; and Murder free the world from tyrants and oppreſſors. Luxury maintains its thouſands, and Vanity its ten thouſands. Superſtition and Arbitrary

Power

Power contribute to the grandeur of many nations, and the liberties of others are preſerved by the perpetual contentions of avarice, knavery, ſelfiſhneſs, and ambition; and thus the worſt of vices, and the worſt of Men, are often compelled by Providence to ſerve the moſt beneficial purpoſes, contrary to their own malevolent tendencies and inclinations; and thus private vices become publick benefits by the force only of accidental circumſtances. But this impeaches not the truth of the Criterion of Virtue before mentioned, the only ſolid foundation on which any true ſyſtem of ethicks can be built, the only plain, ſimple, and uniform rule by which we can paſs any judgment on our actions; but by this we may be enabled, not only to determine which are good, and which are

evil, but almoſt mathematically to demonſtrate the proportion of Virtue or Vice which belongs to each, by comparing them with the degrees of happineſs or miſery which they occaſion. But tho' the production of happineſs is the Eſſence of virtue, it is by no means the End: the great End is the probation of Mankind, or the giving them an opportunity of exalting or degrading themſelves in another ſtate by their behaviour in the preſent. And thus indeed it anſwers two moſt important purpoſes; thoſe are, the conſervation of our happineſs, and the teſt of our obedience: for had not ſuch a teſt ſeemed neceſſary to God's infinite wiſdom, and productive of univerſal Good, he would never have permitted the happineſs of Men, even in this life, to have depended on ſo precarious a tenure,

nure, as their mutual good behaviour to each other. For it is obſervable, that he who beſt knows our formation, has truſted no one thing of importance to our reaſon or virtue: he truſts only to our appetites for the ſupport of the Individual, and the continuance of our ſpecies; to our vanity, or compaſſion, for our bounty to others; and to our fears, for the preſervation of ourſelves; often to our vices for the ſupport of Government, and ſometimes to our follies for the preſervation of our Religion. But ſince ſome teſt of our obedience was neceſſary, nothing ſure could have been commanded for that end ſo fit and proper, and at the ſame time ſo uſeful, as the practice of virtue; nothing have been ſo juſtly rewarded with happineſs, as the production of happineſs in conformity to the will of God.

God. It is this conformity alone which adds merit to virtue, and constitutes the essential difference between Morality and Religion. Morality obliges Men to live honestly and soberly, because such behaviour is most conducive to publick happiness, and consequently to their own; Religion, to pursue the same course, because conformable to the will of their Creator. Morality induces them to embrace virtue from prudential considerations; Religion, from those of gratitude and obedience. Morality therefore, entirely abstracted from Religion, can have nothing meritorious in it; it being but wisdom, prudence, or good œconomy, which, like health, beauty, or riches, are rather obligations conferred upon us by God, than merits in us towards him; for tho' we may be justly punished for injuring

injuring ourſelves, we can claim no reward for ſelf-preſervation; as ſuicide deſerves puniſhment and infamy, but a Man deſerves no reward or honours for not being guilty of it. This I take to be the meaning of all thoſe paſſages in our Scriptures in which Works are repreſented to have no merit without Faith; that is, not without believing in hiſtorical facts, in creeds, and articles; but without being done in purſuance of our belief in God, and in obedience to his commands. And now, having mentioned Scripture, I cannot omit obſerving, that the Chriſtian is the only religious or moral Inſtitution in the world, that ever ſet in a right light theſe two material points, the Eſſence and the End of Virtue; that ever founded the one in the production of happineſs, that is, in univerſal

real benevolence, or, in their language, Charity to all Men; the other, in the probation of Man, and his obedience to his Creator. Sublime and magnificent as was the philosophy of the Ancients, all their moral systems were deficient in these two important articles. They were all built on the sandy foundations of the innate beauty of virtue, or enthusiastick patriotism; and their great point in view was the contemptible reward of human glory; foundations which were by no means able to support the magnificent structures which they erected upon them; for the beauty of virtue, independent of its effects, is unmeaning nonsense; patriotism which injures mankind in general for the sake of a particular country, is but a more extended selfishness, and really criminal; and all human

man glory but a mean and ridiculous deluſion. The whole affair then of Religion and Morality, the ſubject of ſo many thouſand volumes, is in ſhort no more than this: The Supreme Being, infinitely good, as well as powerful, deſirous to diffuſe happineſs by all poſſible means, has created innumerable ranks and orders of Beings, all ſubſervient to each other by proper ſubordination. One of theſe is occupied by Man, a creature endued with ſuch a certain degree of knowledge, reaſon, and free-will, as is ſuitable to his ſituation, and placed for a time on this globe as in a ſchool of probation and education. Here he has an opportunity given him of improving or debaſing his nature, in ſuch a manner as to render himſelf fit for a rank of higher perfection and happineſs, or to degrade

himſelf

himſelf to a ſtate of greater imperfection and miſery; neceſſary indeed towards carrying on the buſineſs of the Univerſe, but very grievous and burthenſome to thoſe individuals, who, by their own miſconduct, are obliged to ſubmit to it. The teſt of this his behaviour, is doing good, that is, co-operating with his Creator, as far as his narrow ſphere of action will permit, in the production of happineſs. And thus the happineſs and miſery of a future ſtate will be the juſt reward or puniſhment of promoting or preventing happineſs in this. So artificially by this means is the nature of all human virtue and vice contrived, that their rewards and puniſhments are woven as it were into their very eſſence; their immediate effects give us a foretaſte of their future, and their fruits in the preſent

ſent life are the proper ſamples of what they muſt unavoidably produce in another. We have Reaſon given us to diſtinguiſh theſe conſequences, and regulate our conduct; and, leſt that ſhould neglect its poſt, Conſcience alſo is appointed as an inſtinctive kind of monitor, perpetually to remind us both of our intereſt and our duty.

When we conſider how wonderfully the practice of Virtue is thus inforced by our great Creator, and that all which he requires of us under that title is only to be happy, that is, to make each other ſo; and when at the ſame time we look round us, and ſee the whole race of mankind thro' every ſucceſſive generation tormenting, injuring, and deſtroying each other, and perpetually counteracting

acting the gracious deſigns of their Maker, it is a moſt aſtoniſhing paradox how all this comes to paſs; why God ſhould ſuffer himſelf to be thus defeated in his beſt purpoſes by creatures of his own making; or why Man ſhould be made with diſpoſitions to defeat them at the expence of his own preſent and future happineſs; why infinite Goodneſs ſhould form creatures inclined to oppoſe its own benevolent deſigns, or why infinite Power ſhould thus ſuffer itſelf to be oppoſed.

The uſual ſolution applied to this difficulty by the ableſt Philoſophers and Divines, with which they themſelves, and moſt of their readers, ſeem perfectly ſatisfied, is comprehended in the following reaſoning: That Man came perfect out of the hands of his Creator, both in

virtue and happineſs, but it being more eligible that he ſhould be a Free-agent than a mere machine, God endued him with Freedom of will; from the abuſe of which freedom, all Miſery and Sin, that is all natural and moral Evils, derive their exiſtence: from all ſuch therefore the Divine Goodneſs is ſufficiently juſtified, by reaſon they could not be prevented without the loſs of ſuperior Good; for to create Men free, and at the ſame time compell them to be virtuous, is utterly impoſſible.

But whatever air of demonſtration this argument may aſſume, by whatever fam'd Preachers it may have been uſed, or by whatever learn'd Audiences it may have been approved, I will venture to affirm, that it is Falſe in all its Principles, and

in its Concluſion alſo; and I think it may be clearly ſhewn, that God did not make Man abſolutely Perfect, nor abſolutely Free; nor, if he had, would this in the leaſt have juſtified the introduction of Wickedneſs and Miſery.

That Man came Perfect, that is indued with all poſſible Perfections, out of the hands of his Creator, is evidently a falſe notion derived from the Philoſophers of the firſt ages, founded on their ignorance of the Origin of Evil, and inability to account for it on any other Hypotheſis: they underſtood not that the univerſal Syſtem required Subordination, and conſequently comparative Imperfections; nor that in the Scale of Beings there muſt be ſomewhere ſuch a creature as Man with all his infirmities about

 him:

him: that the total removal of these would be altering his very Nature; and, that as soon as he became Perfect, he must cease to be Man. The truth of this, I think, has been sufficiently proved; and besides the very supposition of a Being originally perfect, and yet capable of rendering itself wicked and miserable, is undoubtedly a Contradiction, that very power being the highest Imperfection imaginable.

That God made Man perfectly Free is no less false; Men have certainly such a degree of Free-will as to make them accountable, and justly punishable, for the abuse of it; but absolute and independent Free-will is what, I believe, no created Being can be possessed of. Our actions proceed from our Wills, but our

wills muſt be deriv'd from the natural diſpoſitions implanted in us by the Author of our Being: Wrong elections proceed from wrong apprehenſions, or unruly paſſions; and theſe from our original Frame or accidental Education: theſe muſt determine all our actions, for we have no power to act differently, theſe previous circumſtances continuing exactly the ſame. Had God thought proper to have made all Men with the ſame heads, and the ſame hearts, which he has given to the moſt virtuous of the ſpecies, they would all have excelled in the ſame virtues: or had the Byas implanted in Human Nature drawn as ſtrongly towards the good ſide, as it now apparently does towards the bad, it would have operated as ſucceſsfully, and with as little infringement on human Liberty:

Men,

Men, as well as all other animals are exactly fitted for the purposes they are designed for; and have inclinations and diſpoſitions given them accordingly: He, who implanted patience in the lamb, obedience in the Horſe, fidelity in the dog, and innocence in the dove, might as eaſily have inſpired the breaſt of Man with theſe and all other virtues; and then his actions would have certainly correſponded with his Formation: therefore, in the ſtrict philoſophical Senſe, we have certainly no Free-will; that is, none independent of our Frame, our Natures, and the Author of them.

But were both theſe propoſitions true, were Men originally created both perfect and free, yet this would by no means juſtify the introduction of moral Evil;

because, if his Perfection was immediately to be deſtroyed by his Free-will, he might as well never have been poſſeſt of the one, and much better have been prevented from making uſe of the other: let us diſpute therefore as long as we pleaſe, it muſt eternally be the ſame thing, whether a Creator of infinite power and knowledge created Beings originally wicked and miſerable, or gave them a power to make themſelves ſo, foreknowing they would employ that power to their own deſtruction.

If moral Evil therefore cannot be derived from the Abuſe of Free-will in Man, from whence can we trace its origin? Can it proceed from a juſt, a wiſe, and a benevolent God? Can ſuch a God form creatures with diſpoſitions to do

Evil, and then puniſh them for acting in conformity to thoſe evil diſpoſitions? Strange and aſtoniſhing indeed muſt this appear to us, who know ſo little of the univerſal Plan! but is far, I think, from being irreconcileable with the juſtice of the Supreme diſpoſer of all things: for let us but once acknowledge the truth of our firſt great propoſition, (and moſt certainly true it is) that natural Evils exiſt from ſome neceſſity in the Nature of things which no power can diſpenſe with or prevent, the expediency of moral Evil will follow on courſe: for if miſery could not be excluded from the works of a benevolent Creator by infinite power, theſe miſeries muſt be endured by ſome creatures or other for the good of the whole: and if there were none capable of wickedneſs, then they muſt fall to the ſhare of

those who were perfectly innocent. Here again we see our difficulties arise from our wrong notions of Omnipotence, and forgetting how many difficulties it has to contend with: in the present instance it is obliged either to afflict Innocence or be the cause of Wickedness; it has plainly no other Option: what then could infinite Wisdom, Justice and Goodness do in this situation more consistent with itself, than to call into being Creatures formed with such depravity in their dispositions, as to induce many of them to act in such a manner as to render themselves proper subjects for such necessary sufferings, and yet at the same time indued with such a degree of Reason and Free-will to put in the power of every individual to escape them by their good behaviour: Such a Creature is Man; so corrupt, base,

cruel

cruel and wicked as to convert these unavoidable miseries into just punishments, and at the same time so sensible of his own depravity and the fatal consequences of guilt, as to be well able to correct the one and to avoid the other. Here we see a substantial Reason for the Depravity of Man, and the admittance of moral Evil in these circumstances seems not only compatible with the justice of God, but one of the highest instances of his consummate wisdom in ordering and disposing all things in the best manner their imperfect natures will admit.

There is undoubtedly something farther in the general Depravity of Mankind than we are aware of, and probably many great and wise ends are answered by it to us totally incomprehensible. God, as

has

has been ſhewn, would never have permitted the exiſtence of natural Evil, but from the impoſſibility of preventing it without the loſs of ſuperior Good: and on the ſame principle the admiſſion of moral Evil is equally conſiſtent with the divine Goodneſs: and who is he ſo knowing in the whole ſtupendous ſyſtem of Nature, as to aſſert, that the Wickedneſs of ſome Beings may not, by means inconceivable to us, be beneficial to innumerable unknown Orders of others? or that the Puniſhments of ſome may not contribute to the Felicity of numbers infinitely ſuperior?

But let us not forget that this Neceſſity of Vice and Puniſhment, and its ſubſerviency to publick Good, makes no alteration in their natures with regard to

Man;

Man; for, tho' the wiſdom of God may extract from the wickedneſs of Men ſome remote benefits to the Univerſe; yet that alters not the caſe with regard to them, nor in the leaſt extenuates their Guilt. He has given them reaſon ſufficient to inform them, that their injuries to each other are diſpleaſing to him, and Free-will ſufficient to refrain from ſuch actions, and may therefore puniſh their diſobedience without any infringement of juſtice: He knows indeed, that though none are under any compulſion to do Evil, yet that they are all ſo framed, that many will certainly do it; and He knows alſo that incomprehenſible ſecret why it is neceſſary that many ſhould: but His knowledge having no relation to their determinations renders not their vices leſs criminal, nor the puniſhment of them leſs

equitable:

equitable: for, tho', with regard to God, Vice may be perhaps the conſequence of Miſery, that is, Men may be made inclined to Vice, in order to render them proper objects of ſuch a degree of Miſery as was unavoidably neceſſary, and previouſly determined for the ſake of publick Good; yet, in regard to Man, Miſery is the conſequence of Vice; that is, all human Vices produce Miſery, and are juſtly puniſhed by its infliction.

If it be objected that this makes God the Author of Sin, I anſwer, God is, and muſt be the Author of every thing; and to ſay that any thing is, or happens, independent of the firſt Cauſe, is to ſay that ſomething exiſts, or happens, without any Cauſe at all. God is the Author, if it may be ſo expreſſed, of all the

natural

natural Evils in the Universe; that is, of the fewest possible in the Nature of things; and why may he not be the Author of all moral Evil in the same manner and on the same principle? If natural Evil owes it existence to Necessity, why may not Moral? If Misery brings with it its Utility, why may not Wickedness?

"If storms and earthquakes break not Heav'ns design,
"Why then a Borgia or a Cataline!"

Wherefore it ought always to be considered, that, tho' Sin in Us, who see no farther than the Evils it produces, is Evil, and justly punishable; yet in God, who sees the causes and connections of all things, and the necessity of its admission, that admission is no Evil at all, and that necessity

neceſſity a ſufficient vindication of his Goodneſs.

From this important propoſition, that all Natural Evil derives its exiſtence from neceſſity, and all Moral from expediency ariſing from that neceſſity; I ſay, from this important propoſition, well conſidered and purſued, ſuch new lights might be ſtruck out as could not fail, if directed by the hands of Learning and Impartiality, to lead the human Mind thro' unknown regions of ſpeculation, and to produce the moſt ſurpriſing and uſeful diſcoveries in Ethicks, Meraphyſicks, and in Chriſtianity too: I add Chriſtianity, becauſe it is a Maſter-key, which will, I am certain, at once unlock all the myſteries and perplexing doctrines of that amazing Inſtitution, and explain fairly,

fairly, without the leaſt aſſiſtance from theological artifice, all thoſe abſtruſe ſpeculations of Original Sin, Grace and Predeſtination, and vicarious puniſhments, which the moſt learned have never yet been able to make conſiſtent with Reaſon or Common-ſenſe.

In the firſt place, for inſtance, the Doctrine of Original Sin is really nothing more than the very Syſtem here laid down, into which we have been led by cloſely purſuing Reaſon, and without which the Origin of Moral Evil cannot be accounted for on any principle whatever. Indeed, according to the common notions of the abſolute Omnipotence of God, and the abſolute Free-will in Man, it is moſt abſurd and impious, as it repreſents the Deity voluntarily bringing

bringing Men into Being with depraved Diſpoſitions, tending to no good purpoſes, and then arbitrarily puniſhing them for the ſins which they occaſion with torments which anſwer no ends, either of their reformation or utility to the Univerſe: but when we ſee, by the foregoing explanation, the difficulties with which Omnipotence was environed, and that it was obliged by the neceſſity of Natural Evils to admit Moral, all theſe abſurdities at once vaniſh, and the Original Depravity of Man appears fairly conſiſtent with the Juſtice and even Goodneſs of his Creator.

The Doctrines of Predeſtination and Grace as ſet forth in the Scriptures, on the moſt impartial interpretation, I take to be theſe: that ſome Men came into the world

world with diſpoſitions ſo invincibly bad, that God foreknows that they will certainly be guilty of many crimes, and in conſequence be puniſhed for them; that to others He has given better diſpoſitions, and moreover protects them from Vice by a powerfull but inviſible influence, in the language of thoſe writings called Grace: this Scheme has appeared to many ſo partial and unjuſt that they have totally rejected it, and endeavoured, by forced interpretations, to explain it quite out of the Bible, in contradiction to all the ſenſe of language and the whole tenour of thoſe writings: and indeed, on the old plan of God's abſolute Omnipotence, uncontrouled by any previous neceſſity, in the nature of things, to admit both Natural and Moral Evil, it is highly derogatory from His wiſdom and good-

neſs; but, on the ſuppoſition of that previous Neceſſity, there appears nothing incredible in it, nor the leaſt inconſiſtent with divine Juſtice; becauſe, if God was obliged by the nature of things, and for the good of the whole, to ſuffer ſome to be wicked, and conſequently miſerable, he certainly might protect others both from guilt and puniſhment. He in this light may be compared to the commander of a numerous army, who, tho' he is obliged to expoſe many to danger, and ſome to deſtruction, yet protects others with ramparts and covert-ways; but ſo long as he exerciſes this power for the good of the whole, theſe diſtinctions amongſt individuals ought never to be imputed to Partiality or Injuſtice.

The Doctrine of Sacrifice, or Vicarious Puniſhment, is the moſt univerſal, and yet the moſt abſurd, of all religious Tenets that ever entered into the Mind of Man: ſo abſurd is it, that how it came to be ſo univerſal is not eaſy to be accounted for: Pagans, Jews and Chriſtians, have all agreed in this one point, tho' differing in all others; and have all treated it as a ſelf-evident principle, that the Sins of one Creature might be attoned for by the Sufferings of another: but from whence they derived this ſtrange opinion none of them have pretended to give any account, or to produce in its defence the leaſt Shadow of a Reaſon: for that there ſhould be any manner of connection between the Miſeries of one Being and the Guilt of ano-

ther; or, that the punishing the Innocent, and exciting the Guilty, should be a mark of God's Detestation of Sin; or, that two acts of the highest Injustice should make one of Justice, is so fundamentally wrong, so diametrically opposite to Common-sense, and all our ideas of justice, that it is equally astonishing that so many should believe it themselves or impose it upon others. But on the foregoing plan this also may be a little cleared up, and will by no means appear so very inconsistent with Reason: for if a certain quantity of Misery in some part of the Universal System is necessary to the Happiness and Well-being of the Whole; and if this necessity arises from its answering some purposes incomprehensible to the human Understanding; I will ask any impartial

Reaſoner, Why the Sufferings of one Being may not anſwer the ſame Ends, or be as effectual towards promoting Univerſal Good as the Sufferings of another? If the Miſeries of Individuals are to be looked upon as taxes which they are obliged to pay towards the ſupport of the Publick, why may not the Sufferings of one Creature ſerve the ſame purpoſes, or abſolve as much of that neceſſary tax as the Sufferings of another, and on that account be accepted as a payment or ſatisfaction for their Sufferings; that is, for the Sufferings due to the Publick Utility from the puniſhment of their crimes, without which the Happineſs of the Whole could not ſubſiſt, unleſs they ſhould be replaced by the Sufferings of others? As we are intirely ignorant why Miſery has any exiſtence at all, or

what intereſt it ſerves in the general Syſtem of things, this may poſſibly be the caſe for any thing we know; and that it is not, I am certain no one can affirm with Reaſon: Reaſon indeed cannot inform us that it is ſo, but that it may be, is undoubtedly no contradiction to Reaſon.

From what has been here ſaid, I think, it is evident that the Origin of Evil is by no means ſo difficult to account for as at firſt ſight it appears; for it has been plainly ſhewn that moſt of thoſe we uſually complain of are Evils of Imperfection, which are rather the abſence of comparative Advantages than poſitive Evils, and therefore, properly ſpeaking, no Evils at all; and as ſuch ought to be intirely ſtruck out of the Catalogue. It

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has likewiſe been made appear, that of natural Evils, which are the Sufferings of ſenſitive Beings, many are but the conſequences naturally reſulting from the particular circumſtances of particular ranks in the ſcale of Exiſtence, which could not have been omitted without the deſtruction of the Whole; and that many more are in all probability neceſſary, by means to us incomprehenſible, to the production of Univerſal Good. Laſtly, it has been ſuggeſted, that from this neceſſity of Natural Evils may ariſe the expediency of Moral, without which thoſe neceſſary Sufferings muſt have been with leſs juſtice inflicted on perfect innocence; and moreover that it is probable that Moral Evil, as well as Natural, may have ſome ultimate tendency to the Good of the Whole; and that the crimes and

puniſhments of ſome Beings may, by ſome way or other, totally beyond the reach of our narrow capacities, contribute to the Felicity of much greater Numbers.

This Plan, Sir, I am perſwaded is not far diſtant from the truth; and on this Foundation, if I miſtake not, a Syſtem of Morality and Religion, more compleat and ſolid, more conſiſtent with Reaſon, and with Chriſtianity too, might be erected than any which has yet appeared: I heartily wiſh that ſome perſon of more learning, abilities and leiſure than myſelf, (and much more, I am ſure, of all it would require) encouraged by your Favour, and aſſiſted by your Sagacity, would undertake it, and condeſcend to fill up theſe out-lines ſo inaccurately ſketched out by,

SIR, &c.

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LETTER V.

ON

POLITICAL EVILS.

LETTER V.

On Political EVILS.

ACCORDING to my proposed Plan there still remain two sorts of Evils to be accounted for, *Political* and *Religious*; under which heads, (if you are not already tired with so abstruse and unentertaining a correspondence) I shall endeavour to shew you, that it is utterly impossible, even for Omnipotence itself, to give a perfect Government, or a perfect Religion to an imperfect Creature; and therefore, that the numberless imperfections inherent in all human Governments and

LETTER V.

On Political Evils.

SIR,

ACCORDING to my propoſed Plan there ſtill remain two ſorts of Evils to be accounted for, Political and Religious; under which heads, (if you are not already tired with ſo abſtruſe and unentertaining a correſpondence) I ſhall endeavour to ſhew you, that it is utterly impoſſible, even for Omnipotence itſelf, to give a perfect Government, or a perfect Religion to an imperfect Creature; and therefore, that the numberleſs imperfections inherent in all human Governments

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and Religions, are not imputable to God, nor to any defect of power, wisdom, or goodness in Him; but only to the inferiority of Man's station in the Universe, which necessarily exposes him to Natural and Moral Evils, and must, for the same Reason, to Political and Religious; which are indeed but the Consequences of the other. Superior Beings may probably form to themselves, or receive from their Creator, Government without Tyranny or Corruption, and Religions without Delusions or Absurdities; but Man cannot: God indeed may remove him into so exalted a Society, but whilst he continues to be Man, he must be subject to innumerable Evils; amongst which those I call Political and Religious are far from being the least.

But

But as these two kinds of Evils are very different, they will require different considerations; I shall therefore in the present confine myself to the Political only, by which I mean all those grievous burthens of Tyranny and Oppression, of Violence and Corruption, of War and Desolation, under which all ages and nations have ever groaned on account of Government: little less destructive perhaps to the Happiness of Mankind, than even Anarchy itself; but which, notwithstanding, are so woven into the very Essence of all Human Governments from the Depravity of Man, that without them none can be either established, maintained or administered, nor consequently can they be prevented without changing that Depravity into Perfection; that is,

without

without a compleat Alteration of Human Nature. How this comes to paſs may be eaſily explained by a ſhort examination firſt into the nature and origin of Government in general, and afterwards into thoſe of particular Forms and Policies; than which nothing has been more commonly miſunderſtood and miſrepreſented.

As to Government in general, it is no wonder, that it is ſo productive of Evil, ſince its very Nature conſiſts of Power truſted in the hands of ſuch imperfect and vitious Creatures as Men, and exerciſed over others as imperfect and vitious as themſelves; in which there muſt be Pride, Avarice and Cruelty on one Side, Envy, Ignorance and Obſtinacy on the other; and Injuſtice and Self-Intereſt on both.

both. Its Origin alſo ariſes from the ſame impure ſource of human Imperfection; that is, Men being neither wiſe nor honeſt enough, to purſue their common and mutual intereſts without Compulſion, are obliged to ſubmit to ſome, in order to ſecure their lives and properties from the depredations of all: but tho' this Neceſſity drives them into ſome kind of Government, yet it can never decide who ſhall govern, becauſe all Men being by Nature equal, every one has an equal right to this ſuperiority: this therefore can be determined only by more Imperfections; that is, by the Struggles of Ambition, Treachery, Violence and Corruption; from ſucceſs in which univerſal ſcramble are derived all the mighty Empires of the Earth: One Man at firſt by ſome of theſe methods acquiring the

command over a few, than by their aid extending his power over greater numbers, and at laſt by the aſſiſtance of thoſe numbers, united by the advantage of plundering others, ſubduing all oppoſition: and thus we ſee all human Government is the Offspring of Violence and Corruption, and muſt inherit the imperfection of both its parents. It is plain alſo that national Governments can never be ſupported by any other methods than thoſe by which they were at firſt rais'd; for, being all independent of each other, and retaining ſtill their original inclination to devour each other; and having no ſuperior tribunal to refer to for juſtice, they can have no means to ſecure their own poſſeſſions, or to repel their mutual encroachments, but by Force, which is call'd the Right of War; that is, the

right

right of doing all the wrong that lies in their power: For war, however dignified with honours and encomiums by conquerors and their flatterers, is in fact nothing else but robbery and murder. Nations having no more right to plunder each other than Parishes, nor Men to kill one another in their political than in their private capacities.

If we look into the internal constitutions of all these Governments, we shall find likewise, that they must be administered by the same violence and corruption to which they are indebted for their Origin; that is, by hiring one part of the society to force the other into subjection; and that none of them ever subsisted any longer than whilst the stronger part, not always the most numerous, found it for

their advantage to keep the weaker in obedience: for it ſhould be ever remembered, as the fundamental of all politics, that Men will never ſubmit to each other merely for the ſake of publick Utility, too remote a benefit to make any impreſſion on the dull ſenſes of the multitude; but muſt be always beat or bribed into obedience. Higher orders of Beings may ſubmit to each other on nobler motives, from their ſenſe of Virtue or of univerſal Benefit; but Man can be governed by nothing but the Fear of Puniſhment or the Hopes of Reward; that is, by Self-intereſt, the great principle that operates in the political World in the ſame manner that Attraction does in the natural, preſerving order and reſtraining every thing to its proper courſe by the continual endeavours of every individual

to draw all power and property to himſelf.

If we deſcend to the examination of particular forms of government, we ſhall ſee them all exactly correſpond with this general plan; we ſhall find that none of them owe their Origin to patriarchal power, the divine right of Princes, or the uninfluenced choice of the People; things which never exiſted but in the idle dreams of viſionary politicians; but all to the ſtruggles of Ambition and Self-Intereſt, ſubſiding at laſt into ſome kind of Policy; either into abſolute Monarchy or ſome ſpecies of popular Government more or leſs remote from it, as the different parts of it have had Strength or Fortune to prevail; all which muſt be carried on by the ſame vitious methods

of Violence or Corruption, and conſequently be productive of numberleſs, if not of equal, Evils.

In abſolute Monarchies, for inſtance, great violence muſt be exerciſed to keep men, by nature equal, in ſo unnatural a Subjection; this muſt produce plots, rebellions, civil wars and maſſacres; and theſe muſt require more Violence to repreſs them: but this Violence cannot be uſed without much Corruption; for it is not the perſon of the ſovereign, his crown and ſcepter, that can preſerve his authority, nor can he deſtroy thouſands with his own hand, like a Hero in Romance; a powerful army muſt be kept in pay to enſlave the people, and a numerous clergy to deceive them; whoſe ambition, avarice, luxury and cruelty muſt be ſatiated

tiated with the blood and treaſures of that very People as a reward for their ſervices: hence infinite Evils muſt ariſe, the lives, liberties and properties of all muſt be dependent on the capricious will of One, or, what is worſe, on the wills of his pimps, flatterers and favorites: juſtice muſt be perverted by favour, and that favour can ſeldom be obtained but by adulation, ſervility and treachery: this produces all kinds of Moral Evils, and theſe beget more Political.

In Democratical Governments, if there is leſs Violence there is more Corruption; which in theſe indeed is the Baſis of all Power, and productive of the moſt miſchievous effects; here all things are at the diſpoſal of an ignorant and giddy

Multitude, always led to their own deſtruction by the flimſy eloquence and pretended patriotiſm of Knaves, Fools, and enthuſiaſtic Madmen; or commonly of ſome extraordinary Genius, formed for popularity by a lucky compoſition of all theſe excellent ingredients; all ſubordination is inverted; and the moſt inſolent and vitious of the people muſt be careſſed, bribed and intoxicated, and by that means rendered ſtill more inſolent and vitious; and all who by theſe methods acquire their favour muſt be no leſs vitious than themſelves. If in deſpotic Governments Power cannot be attained but by Servility and Adulation, in Democratical it can never be acquired but by the moſt pernicious Vices of Turbulence and Faction; for which Reaſon theſe are ever ſure

to be governed by the moſt wicked, ambitious, avaricious and miſchievous of their Members.

Mixed Governments, tho' perhaps productive of fewer Evils than either of the former, yet muſt neceſſarily partake of thoſe belonging to both, and be ſupported by more or leſs Violence, as they more or leſs approach the Deſpotic; or of Corruption, as they come nearer to the Democratical Principles: the further they ſhrink from the iron ſcourges of the one, the more will they be entangled in the golden fetters of the other; for Corruption muſt always increaſe in due proportion to the decreaſe of arbitrary Power, ſince where there is leſs power to command obedience there muſt be more bribery to purchaſe it, or there can be no

Government at all. These have beſides many Evils peculiar to themſelves, the very excellence of theſe ſort of Conſtitutions being productive of inconveniences: for this excellence conſiſting principally in this, that their different parts are able to counteract each others miſchievous intentions, the reins of Government are kept tight only by each pulling a different way, and they ſubſiſt by a perpetual contention, like a body kept alive by the oppoſite effects of contrary poiſons; a very precarious and uneaſy kind of exiſtence! This expoſes them in ſome meaſure to all the Evils incident to both abſolute and popular Governments, tho' in a leſs degree: to the oppreſſion of the one, and the licentiouſneſs of the other, to factions at home, weakneſs abroad, and infinite expence in all parts of their adminiſtration:

adminiſtration: yet are theſe mixed conſtitutions the very beſt that human wiſdom could ever diſcover for the regulation of human Societies.

All theſe Evils ariſe from the Nature of Things and the Nature of Man, and not from the Weakneſs or Wickedneſs of particular Men, or their accidental aſcendency in particular Governments: the degrees of them may indeed be owing to theſe, but their exiſtence is immutable. So long as the Imperfection of Human Nature continues, ſo long will Princes, for the moſt part, convert that power with which they are truſted for the ſake of public Utility, to the ignoble ends of their own avarice, luxury or ambition; ſo long will the people prefer preſent Self-intereſt to remote benefits ariſing from

from national proſperity; and ſo long will corrupt miniſters employ this popular venality to their own private advantage; and how many ſoever are lopt off,

Non deficit aureus alter.

It is the miſapprehenſion of this, that is the fundamental error of all ignorant, but well-meaning, ſpeculative politicians, of all others the moſt untractable in government, and miſchievous in buſineſs, the engines with which knaves work, and the ladders on which they mount to preferment: who endeavour to deſtroy all governments, becauſe they are not perfect; and oppoſe all adminiſtrations, becauſe they cannot govern men by ſuch means as they are not deſign'd, or form'd to be govern'd by: who, by a Syſiphæan kind

kind of politics, are ever labouring to roll up a ſtone, that muſt recoil upon them; and to render that faultleſs, which infinite power and wiſdom cannot exempt from inconveniences, abuſes, and imperfections.

Should one innumerate all of this kind, which cannot be excluded from Government without the total alteration of human nature, they would be endleſs; to inſtance but a few: all political bodies, like the natural, muſt have the ſeeds of their own diſſolution ſown in their very eſſence, and like them be deſtroy'd by every exceſs; by exceſs of poverty or riches, of ſlavery or liberty, of ignorance or knowledge, of adverſity or proſperity: a ſtrong proof of their imperfection, that they cannot bear exceſs even

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of the greateſt good; and yet they cannot be form'd of more durable materials, ſo long as they are conſtituted of human creatures. All power truſted in the hands of ſo imperfect a creature as man, muſt be pernicious and oppreſſive, and yet ſomewhere ſuch power muſt be truſted. All human Laws muſt be liable to miſconſtruction, and uncertainty, yet without Laws property cannot be ſecur'd. All popular Elections muſt be attended with corruption, licentiouſneſs, and the perverſion of juſtice, yet without them the liberty of no country can be preſerv'd. All national proviſions for the poor muſt not only be encouragements to idleneſs, but productive of conteſts, and oftentimes of cruelty, yet without ſuch many honeſt but unfortunate people muſt inevitably periſh. All religious teſts, and

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ſubſcriptions, are in their own natures ſubverſive of truth and morals, yet the folly of one part of mankind, and the knavery of the other, will ſcarcely permit any Government to ſubſiſt without them. Trade and wealth are the ſtrength and the purſuit of every wiſe nation, yet theſe muſt certainly produce Luxury, which no leſs certainly muſt produce their deſtruction. All War is a complication of all manner of Evils natural and moral, that is, of miſery and wickedneſs, yet without it national contentions can never be determin'd. No Government can be carry'd on, nor ſubordination preſerv'd, without forms, and ceremonials, pomp, and parade; yet all ſuch, from the inferiority of human nature giving itſelf airs of grandeur and magnificence, and the deſpicable expedients it

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is oblig'd to have recourſe to to ſupport it, muſt always have ſomething mean and ridiculous in them to exalted underſtandings. All Governments are in a great meaſure upheld by abſurd notions infus'd into the minds of the people, of the divine right of ſome particular perſon or family to reign over them; a fooliſh partiality for ſome particular ſpot of ground; an outrageous zeal for ſome religion which they cannot underſtand, or a fenſeleſs purſuit of Glory which they can never attain; theſe are all falſe principles, yet without them, or ſome like them, no nation can long ſubſiſt: they can never be defended by reaſon, yet reaſon can produce no others that can ſupply their places. Every flouriſhing nation endeavours to improve Arts, and cultivate Reaſon and good ſenſe; yet, if theſe are

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extended too far, or too universally diffus'd, no national government or national religion can long ſtand their ground; for it is with old Eſtabliſhments as with old houſes, their deformities are commonly their ſupports, and theſe can never be remov'd without endangering the whole fabrick. In ſhort, no Government can be adminiſter'd without in ſome degree deceiving the people, oppreſſing the mean, indulging the great, corrupting the venal, oppoſing factions to each other, and temporiſing with parties.

It is this neceſſity for Evil in all Government, which gives that weight and popularity, which uſually attends all thoſe who oppoſe, and calumniate any Government whatever; appearing always to have reaſon on their ſide, becauſe the Evils of

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all powers are conſpicuous to the meaneſt capacity, whereas the neceſſity for thoſe Evils are perceivable only to ſuperior underſtandings: every one can feel the burthen of taxes, and ſee the inconveniences of armies, places, and penſions, that muſt increaſe them, but very few are able to comprehend that no Government can be ſupported without them in a certain degree; and that the more liberty any nation enjoys, the greater muſt be their number, and neceſſity. The moſt ignorant can perceive the miſchiefs that muſt ariſe from corrupt Miniſters and venal Parliaments, but it requires ſome ſagacity to diſcern, that aſſemblies of men unconnected by ſelf-intereſt will no more draw together in the buſineſs of the publick, than horſes without harneſs and bridles; but, like them, inſtead of being

being quietly guided in the right road of general utility, will immediately run riot, ſtop the wheels of government, and tear all the political machine to pieces.

From hence it comes to paſs that all ignorant wrong-headed people naturally run into oppoſition and faction, whilſt the wiſe man knows that theſe Evils cannot be eradicated, and that their exceſs only can be prevented; that thus far every honeſt man will endeavour to his utmoſt, but to proceed farther only fools will hope for, or knaves pretend. He knows that numbers of men muſt always act in the ſame manner, if in the ſame circumſtances; that Politicks are a Science as reducible to certainty as Mathematicks, and in them effects as invariably follow their cauſes: that the operations of Will

are as uniform, as thoſe of matter and motion; and that, tho' the actions of individuals are contingencies, thoſe of numbers are conſtant, and invariable: that, tho' a ſingle man may poſſibly prefer publick utility to private advantage, it is utterly impoſſible, that the majority of numerous bodies ſhould be actuated by the ſame generous, and patriotic principles; theſe can ſpring only from Virtue and Wiſdom, benevolent hearts, and comprehenſive underſtandings; which, being the portion but of a few more exalted individuals, can never be found in the multitude to be govern'd; nor can they be beſtow'd in any extraordinary degree on thoſe who govern, who wou'd thereby be render'd unfit for their occupations: Stateſmen, and Miniſters, who muſt be hackney'd

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in the ways of men, cannot be made of ſuch pure and refin'd materials; peculiar muſt be the compoſition of that little creature call'd a *Great Man* form'd of all kinds of contradictions: He muſt be indefatigable in buſineſs, to fit him for the labours of his ſtation, and at the ſame time fond of pleaſures, to enable him to attach many to his intereſts by a participation of their vices: He muſt be maſter of much artifice and knavery, his ſituation requiring him to employ, and be employ'd by ſo many knaves; yet he muſt have ſome honeſty, or thoſe very knaves will be unwilling to truſt him: He muſt be poſſeſs'd of great magnanimity perpetually to confront ſurrounding enemies, and impending dangers; yet of great meanneſs, to flatter thoſe enemies, and ſuffer tamely continual injuries, and

abuſes? He muſt be wiſe enough to conduct the great affairs of Mankind with ſagacity and ſucceſs, and to acquire riches, and honours for his reward; and at the ſame time fooliſh enough to think it worth a wiſe man's while to meddle with ſuch affairs at all, and to accept of ſuch imaginary rewards for real ſufferings. Since then in all human Governments ſuch muſt the Governors, and ſuch the Governed eternally be, it is certain they muſt be ever big with numberleſs imperfections, and productive of abundant evils: and it is no leſs plain, that if infinite Goodneſs cou'd not exclude natural and moral Evils, infinite Power can never prevent political.

I hope, Sir, the picture I have here drawn of human nature, and human Go-

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vernment, will not appear to you too much of the Caricature kind; your experience in both muſt inform you that it is like, tho' your good-nature may incline you to be ſorry that it is ſo. I truſt likewiſe to your good-ſenſe to diſtinguiſh, that what has here been ſaid of their imperfections, and abuſes, is by no means intended as a defence of them, but meant only to ſhew their neceſſity: to this every wiſe man ought quietly to ſubmit, endeavouring at the ſame time to redreſs them to the utmoſt of his power; which can be effected by one method only; that is, by a reformation of Manners: for as all Political Evils derive their Original from Moral, theſe can never be remov'd, until thoſe are firſt amended. He, therefore, who ſtrictly adheres to Virtue and Sobriety in his con-

duct, and inforces them by his example, does more real ſervice to a State, than he who diſplaces a Miniſter, or dethrones a Tyrant; this gives but a temporary relief, but that exterminates the cauſe of the diſeaſe. No immoral man then can poſſibly be a true patriot; and all thoſe who profeſs outrageous zeal for the liberty and proſperity of their Country, and at the ſame time infringe her laws, affront her religion, and debauch her people, are but deſpicable Quacks, by fraud or ignorance increaſing the diſorders they pretend to remedy: as ſuch, I know, they have always appear'd to your ſuperior judgment, and ſuch they are ever eſteem'd by,

SIR, &c.

LETTER VI.

ON

RELIGIOUS EVILS.

LETTER VI.

On Religious Evils.

NOW come to my last head of Evils, which I call Religious; by which I mean all that madnels, and folly, into which mankind have perpetually fallen, under the name of Religion; together with all thole Perlecutions, Maflacres, and Martyrdoms, which lome have been induced to inflict, and others to luffer, from an Enthuliaftic Zeal for thole errors and abluidities: Evils of the moft enormous lize, and which of all others are the moft difficult to be accounted for, as

LETTER VI.

On Religious Evils.

SIR,

I NOW come to my laſt head of Evils, which I call Religious; by which I mean all that madneſs, and folly, into which mankind have perpetually fallen, under the name of Religion; together with all thoſe Perſecutions, Maſſacres, and Martyrdoms, which ſome have been induced to inflict, and others to ſuffer, from an Enthuſiaſtic Zeal for thoſe errors and abſurdities: Evils of the moſt enormous ſize, and which of all others are the moſt difficult to be accounted for,

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as their existence seems most inconsistent with infinite Goodness, and most easily preventable by infinite Power. For, tho' human nature cou'd not be exempted from natural and moral Evil (as has been shewn) even by Omnipotence, yet, one would think, a far less degree of power might have been sufficient to have defended it from Religious; by imparting to Mankind a true, rational, and explicite system of Theology, and Ethicks; by which means all the absurdities of false Religions, and all the calamities flowing from those absurdities would have been effectually prevented. Wonderful therefore must it appear, since the happiness of Men, thro' every part of their existence, so much depends on their Religion, that is, on their entertaining right notions of God and his Attributes, of

their duty to him, and their behaviour to each other; moſt wonderful, I ſay, and aſtoniſhing it muſt appear, that a wiſe and benevolent Creator ſhould ſo far have deſerted his Creatures on this important occaſion, as to have ſuffered them thro' all generations to have wandered amidſt ſuch perilous precipices in the dark; or if at any time he has vouchſafed them any ſupernatural light, that it ſhould have been ſo faint and glimmering that it has rather ſerved to terrify them with the gloomy proſpect of their danger than to enable them to avoid it.

If we look back as far as hiſtory will carry us, we ſhall find all ages and nations practiſing, under the name of Religion, ſuch inhuman, obſcene, ſtupid and execrable Idolatries that it would diſgrace human

man Nature but to enumerate them: we ſhall ſee the wiſeſt Men of the wiſeſt Countries conſulting Oracles of wood and ſtone, and confiding in the fooliſh ſuperſtition of the flight of birds, the entrails of beaſts, and the pecking of chickens; we ſhall ſee them butchering their innocent herds and flocks as an atonement for their vices, and ſacrificing their enemies, their ſlaves, their children, and ſometimes themſelves, to appeaſe the wrath of their imaginary Deities, of whoſe worſhip no cruelty was too horrid to be made a part; and by whoſe infamous examples no wickedneſs was too execrable to be patroniſed. At length Chriſtianity appeared, a ſketch of Morality the moſt rational, and of Religion the moſt ſublime the World had ever ſeen; which, if ever God condeſcended to reveal his

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Will to Man, undoubtedly makes the faireſt pretenſions to be that Revelation: and indeed, if we ſeriouſly conſider its internal Excellence, the reaſonableneſs of its Morality, the ſublimity of its Theology, that it alone has fixed the right Criterion of Virtue, alone diſcovered the magnanimity of Forgiveneſs: that its notions of the Deity, his attributes and diſpenſations, are ſo unlike all that ever entered into the heads of the wiſeſt philoſophers of preceding ages, and yet ſo well confirmed by the learned diſcoveries of all ſucceeding times; ſo far exalted above all human Reaſon, and yet ſo conſonant with it, and what is moſt concluſive, ſo infinitely above the Capacities of thoſe who publiſhed them to the World; if we add to this its obſcure riſe and amazing progreſs, I think, we can

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ſcarcely doubt but that there muſt be ſomething Supernatural in it: and yet, with all theſe marks of Divinity ſtamped upon it, far from anſwering that idea of Perfection which we might expect from the divine Interpoſition, it was but a Sketch whoſe Out-lines indeed appear the Work of a conſummate Maſter, but filled up from time to time by unequal and injudicious hands. It had many defects in its inſtitution, and was attended with many and great Evils in its conſequences; in its inſtitution it wanted Univerſality, Authenticity, Perſpicuity and Policy; and in its conſequences it was ſoon corrupted, and from that corruption productive of the moſt miſchievous effects. Its great Author deſigned it not to be exempted from any of theſe Imperfections. He revealed it only to a ſmall and obſcure

ſcure corner of the World in Parables and Myſteries: He guarded not its original Purity, which ſeems to have died with its Author, by committing it to any written Records, but left it in the hands of illiterate Men, who, tho' they were honeſt enough to dye for it, were never wiſe enough perfectly to underſtand it. All Policy he diſclaims in expreſs Words, ſaying, *My Kingdom is not of this World*; that is, I meddle not with the Political Affairs of Mankind, I teach Men to deſpiſe the World, but not to govern it. Nor did He expect any better conſequences from its progreſs than thoſe which actually followed: He was by no means ignorant of its future corruption, and that, tho' his primitive inſtitution breathed nothing but Peace and Forbearance, Good-will and Benevolence; yet that

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mixing with the Policies and Intereſts of Mankind, it would be productive of tyranny and oppreſſion, of martyrdoms and maſſacres, of national wars and family diſſentions. *Think not*, ſays He, *I come to ſend Peace on Earth, I come not to ſend Peace but a Sword: for I am come to ſet a man at Variance againſt his father, and the daughter againſt her mother, and the daughter-in-law againſt her mother-in law.* A Prophecy too fatally fulfilled!

From what inſcrutable ſource can all theſe imperfections, and all theſe conſequent Evils derive their exiſtence? On what incomprehenſible plan muſt the wiſe Diſpoſer of all things proceed, to ſuffer Men thus to bewilder themſelves in the labyrinths of error, and from thence

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to plunge into the gulphs of wickedneſs and miſery, when the leaſt direction from his omnipotent hand would lead them thro' the flowery paths of Truth to Virtue and Felicity? Strange! that he has not given them Reaſon ſufficient to perform this important office! Stranger! that, if ever he condeſcended to aſſiſt that Reaſon with his infinite Wiſdom, even the Religion that reſults from that ſupernatural aſſiſtance ſhould be ſtill deficient in almoſt every one of the principle requiſites neceſſary towards accompliſhing the great and beneficent ends it was deſigned for! that it ſhould want Univerſality to render it impartial; Authenticity to make it demonſtrable, Perſpicuity to make it intelligible, and Policy to make it uſeful to Mankind: that it ſhould immediately have been corrupted, and from

that corruption been productive of all the Misery and Wickedness it seemed calculated to prevent. But on examination we shall find, that these Evils, like all those of which we have before treated, owe their existence to no defect of goodness or power in God, but to the imperfection of Man and their own necessity: that is, to the impracticability of giving a perfect Religion to an imperfect Creature: from whence this impracticability arises I will endeavour to explain.

There are but two methods, that we know of, by which God can communicate a Religion to Mankind: that is, either by the deductions which he has impowered him to make by the force of that natural reason which he has implanted in him, or by the extraordinary

interposition

interpoſition of divine Revelation: now from the firſt of theſe little need be ſaid to ſhew that nothing perfect can be expected: our Reaſon is unſtable in its foundations, and uncertain in its concluſions; our lives are extremely ſhort, and our progreſs in ſcience no leſs tedious, and retarded by numberleſs obſtacles: much of our time is employed in getting ideas, and much in acquiring language to expreſs them: few Men have capacities to reaſon, and fewer leiſure: ſome having ſenſe but no learning want materials to work with; others having learning, and no ſenſe, become more abſurd by having amaſſed much matter to miſtake about: ſo that to raiſe any tolerable ſyſtem of Religion, or Morals, from human Reaſon, requires the labours of many generations; from all which have

already past how little truth can we collect? and yet perhaps much of that little is owing to Revelation, which we are apt to think unneceſſary from the very aſſiſtance we have received from it; like the country-man who deſpiſed the Sun becauſe it ſhined in the day-time. We ſee but a very ſmall part of the great Whole, and ſee that ſmall part ſo ſuperficially, that we comprehend not the eſſence of any thing; neither of Body or Spirit, of Space or Time, of Infinity or Eternity; we know ſcarce any thing of any thing, and leaſt of all of the Nature of God or ourſelves; and therefore it is by no means ſurpriſing that all Religions derived from ſuch a ſource ſhould be full of Errors and Abſurdities. If it be aſſerted, that God might have given to Man a more comprehenſive Reaſon and

a greater Inſight into Nature and Futurity: I anſwer, he certainly might; and he might alſo have given him the ſtrength of the Horſe and the ſwiftneſs of the Stag, as well as the underſtanding of an Angel; but then he had not continued to be Man; or if he had, he would have ſuffered many ſuperior Evils from theſe unhappy acquiſitions.

If we conſider the other method, by which God can communicate a Religion to Mankind, we ſhall find it no leſs incapable of producing a perfect one; becauſe, tho' God is ſufficiently able to give a perfect Religion, Man is utterly unable to receive it. God cannot impart knowledge to Creatures, of which he himſelf has made them incapable by their nature and formation: he cannot inſtruct

a Mole in Aſtronomy or an Oyſter in Muſick, becauſe he has not given them Members, nor Faculties neceſſary for the acquiſition of thoſe ſciences: neither is this any diminution of his Omnipotence, becauſe acting in ſuch a manner would be willing Contrarieties at the ſame time; it would be oppoſing his own Deſigns, making Creatures what they are not, and granting them Powers which he thought proper to deny them: a Revelation therefore from God can never be ſuch as we might expect from infinite Power, Wiſdom and Goodneſs, but muſt condeſcend to the Ignorance and Infirmities of Man: was the wiſeſt Legiſlator in the World to compoſe Laws for a Nurſery they muſt be Childiſh Laws; ſo was God to reveal a Religion to Mankind, tho' the Revealer was

divine the Religion muſt be human, or it could be of no uſe to thoſe for whoſe ſakes it was revealed: and therefore, like them, it muſt be liable to numberleſs Imperfections, amongſt which all thoſe Deficiencys before-mentioned are abſolutely unavoidable, and impoſſible to be prevented by any power whatever: theſe are the Want of Univerſality, Authenticity, Perſpicuity and Policy; its certain Corruption, with all that inundation of Wickedneſs and Miſery which muſt flow from that Corruption. Great and numerous Evils! from which it is not difficult to ſhew, that no Revelation communicated to Man can be exempted by an Omnipotent Revealer.

Firſt then it muſt want Univerſality: that is, however conducive it may be to

the virtue and happiness of Mankind in general, it cannot be alike communicated to all Men in all ages and all nations of the World; because, from the nature of things, it must have a beginning and a progression: it must at first be revealed at some time and in some place; and whenever and where-ever that is, there must have been times and places in which it was not revealed; and therefore it is impossible it can be Universal; and this not proceeding from any impotence or partiality in the Revealer, but from the modes of existence of all human affairs.

It must likewise want Authenticity: that is, tho' its divine Authority may be more or less credible according to the circumstances of the evidence, yet it can never

never be capable of a direct or demonstrative proof, because God must communicate this Revelation to Mankind either by a general or a particular Inspiration: that is, either by inspiring all Men, or by inspiring a few to teach it to others: the first of these methods, or a Universal Inspiration, is impossible in Nature, and absurd even in Imagination, and would be the total alteration of human nature: the other must ever be liable to infinite uncertainty, because, tho' a Man may possibly know when he himself is inspired, (tho' that, I think, may be very well questioned) yet, that he should ever produce indubitable credentials of a Divine Commission to others, who are uninspired seems utterly impracticable, there being no marks by which the fact can be ascertained, nor any faculties

culties in the human mind which are able to diſtinguiſh it: the excellence of the Revelation he teaches, its beneficent ends, and the miracles he may work in its confirmation, may altogether render it more or leſs probable, but can never amount to a certain proof, becauſe we know ſo little of the ends and conſequences of things, and ſo much leſs of the nature of Miracles: we underſtand indeed nothing about them, but that we ourſelves are unable to perform them; but what Beings of ſuperior Orders may be able to do we cannot tell; nor yet what power, inclination or permiſſion ſuch Beings may have to deceive us. If it is impoſſible therefore we can be certain of the divine Authority of a Revelation, even by a perſonal communication with its firſt Author, much leſs can we

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be assured of it thro' the fallacious mediums of Tradition or History; for whoever observes the propensity Men have to impose upon both themselves and others, how difficult it is to come at a true Representation of the commonest fact, even at the distance of a few miles or a few years, will be easily convinced, that all human Tradition can be nothing more than a Complication of designed Fraud and inevitable Error; a Glass which misrepresents all objects by magnifying or diminishing them, just as it is placed by the hand of Knavery for the inspection of Folly and Credulity. History indeed carries with it a greater Authority, but must ever be liable to infinite Imperfections: we can never be certain that the Writers of it, being Men, were not imposed upon themselves or did not intend

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to impose on others; and therefore its original evidence cannot be conclusive, and must grow daily weaker in proportion to its antiquity: it must necessarily be subject to all uncertainties proceeding from the variation of languages and cu^oms, ignorant transcribers, false translations, interpolations and forgeries; and as the histories of Religions are more connected with Mens interests than those of other occurrences, so they must be ever more subject to these Frauds and Impositions; for the same reason that a Bank-note is more likely to be counterfeited than a News-paper. It is therefore impossible that History can afford us any certain proof of a supernatural and miraculous dispensation, because a Fact, unlikely to be true can never be demonstrated by a Relation not impossible to be false.

falſe. If it be ſaid, that God may inſpire the writers of ſuch important Records with Infallibility, I anſwer, the Proof that he has ſo inſpired them will be attended with no leſs difficulty than the proof of that divine authority which is to be eſtabliſhed by it; and it muſt ever be abſurd to prove the truth of a Revelation by the infallibility of its Records, and the infallibility of its Records from the truth of the Revelation. It is plain therefore, that, tho' infinite Goodneſs may reveal a Religion to ſo imperfect a creature as Man, yet infinite Power cannot, by reaſon of that Imperfection, give to that Revelation ſuch a degree of Authenticity that is ſuch a demonſtrable proof of its divine Authority as ſome Men unſeaſonably expect, and others as ridiculouſly beſtow upon it.

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It muſt want Perſpicuity: that is, it muſt be much more obſcure both in its ſpeculative and practical Doctrines, than might be expected from the interpoſition of infinite wiſdom, truth and benevolence. In its ſpeculative Doctrines Obſcurity muſt be unavoidable, becauſe they muſt treat of ſubjects above the reach of our Comprehenſions: which neither eye has ſeen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of Man to conceive; and therefore no Power can impart to us clear and explicit Ideas of ſuch things without firſt beſtowing on us new faculties and new ſenſes; that is, without the total alteration of our Natures. But what is moſt of all extrordinary is, that it muſt be likewiſe to a certain degree obſcure in its practical and moral precepts; and

and this from a reaſon not the leſs valid for having never before been inſiſted on; which is, from the Neceſſity of Moral Evil: that is, ſince God, as has been ſhewn, was obliged by Neceſſity to admit Moral Evil into the Creation, he muſt probably be obliged, by the ſame Neceſſity, to ſuffer it in ſome degree to continue; and therefore cannot inforce the univerſal practice of Virtue by laws ſo explicit, by threats and promiſes ſo glaring, and by commands ſo inconteſtably of divine Authority as can admit of no doubt; for theſe would be ſo abſolutely irreſiſtable as at once to eradicate all human Vice, which has already been proved to have been admitted only from the impoſſibility of its excluſion without the introduction of greater Evils or the loſs of ſuperior Good. If Omnipotence could

could not prevent the exiſtence of Moral Evil by the original formation of Man, totally to extirpate it by Revelation would be to counteract his own wiſe, tho' incomprehenſible deſigns; and therefore a Divine Revelation can never be a regular Body of practical Inſtitutes, clear and perſpicuous, free from all doubts and altercations, inforced by perpetual Miracles, by viſible and immediate Rewards and Puniſhments; but a ſtill Voice whiſpering gentle Warnings, divine Admonitions and ſupernatural Truths; a Light ſhining in a dark place, illuminating to a certain degree the native Obſcurity of the human Mind, and diſcovering by faint glimmerings the Deſigns of Providence, and a diſtant proſpect of a future Life.

It muſt alſo want policy: that is, it can never preſcribe political rules by which Mankind can be conducted in the Government of Nations, or their pretended rights of War and Peace, becauſe all theſe affairs being incapable (as has been ſhewn) of being carry'd on by any other means than thoſe of violence, fraud, and corruption; a Divine Revelation cannot poſſibly give any directions about them; becauſe all ſuch muſt be neceſſarily inconſiſtent either with Virtue or with practicability: totally to forbid theſe methods of governing mankind, who can be govern'd by no other, would be deſtructive of all Government; to allow them, of all Morality: and therefore it is neceſſary that men ſhould be left to act in theſe matters at their peril, as particular circumſtances may require, with only a

general ſyſtem of religion and morality for their guide. If a Divine Revelation can give no Laws for the management of Civil Government, much leſs can it inſtitute any new policies peculiar to itſelf, under the names of Spiritual or Eccleſiaſtical; all which, however divine in their Original, muſt neceſſarily be adminiſter'd, if adminiſter'd by Man, by the ſame unjuſtifiable methods as others, with this additional inconvenience, that they cou'd never be juſtly reſiſted. God cannot therefore, I apprehend, delegate Spiritual power to Man, without patroniſing all that Violence, Corruption, and Iniquity, which muſt reſult from it, and without which no power in the hands of Men can be exerciſed over Men. For the imperfection of Man is incompatible with the purity of a Divine Government.

The Government of all creatures muſt correſpond with their natures; and it ſeems to me as impoſſible that Societies of Men ſhould ſubmit under a Divine Government, as that Wolves and Tygers ſhou'd live together under the regulations of Human Policy: but moſt of all impoſſible it muſt be that a divine and human Government ſhould ſubſiſt together in the ſame Society, for they muſt immediately claſh; and whenever that happens, the leaſt ſpark of divine authority, if really divine, muſt infallibly conſume all human power, and deſtroy all Civil Government whatever.

Laſtly, it muſt very ſoon be corrupted, and from that corruption be productive of the moſt miſchievous effects: for, as the pureſt ſtream pour'd into an im-

pure veſſel muſt partake of its impurity; ſo muſt the moſt perfect Religion, that can be reveal'd by God to ſo imperfect a creature as Man, partake of his imperfection, and produce many and great Evils both natural and moral; that is, much of that miſery, and wickedneſs, which it was intended to prevent: this no wiſdom can obviate, no power put a ſtop to, ſo long as that imperfection remains; but it muſt conſtantly come to paſs from a train of unavoidable conſequences, which muſt invariably follow their cauſes, ſo long as human nature continues what it is.

For inſtance, when a Divine Revelation is firſt communicated to Mankind, it muſt be receiv'd (if receiv'd at all) becauſe its precepts are approv'd, and its au-

authority believ'd; and all thoſe nations, who thus approve the one, and believe the other, muſt eſteem it both their intereſt and their duty to encourage and ſupport it. This they can effect by no other means than by granting peculiar privileges to all who profeſs it, by forming from it their national Religion, and publick worſhip, and by maintaining an Order of Men to preach that Religion, and miniſter that worſhip, to the people; all which amounts to a National Eſtabliſhment. Now the moment any Religion becomes national, or eſtabliſhed, its purity muſt certainly be loſt, becauſe it is then impoſſible to keep it unconnected with mens intereſts; and if connected, it muſt inevitably be perverted by them. Whenever temporal advantages are annex'd to any religious profeſſion,

they will be ſure to call in all thoſe who have no religion at all: knaves will embrace it for the ſake of intereſt, fools will follow them for the ſake of faſhion; and when once it is in ſuch hands, Omnipotence itſelf can never preſerve its purity. That very Order of Men, who are maintain'd to ſupport its intereſts, will ſacrifice them to their own; and being in the ſole poſſeſſion of all its promiſes, and all its terrors, and having the tenderneſs of Childhood, and weakneſs of Age, and the ignorance of the vulgar to work upon; I ſay, theſe Men, veſted with all theſe powers, yet being but Men, will not fail to convert all the mighty influence they muſt derive from them to the ſelfiſh ends of their own avarice or ambition, and conſequently to the total deſtruction of its Original Purity: from

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it they will lay claim to powers which it never deſign'd them, and to poſſeſſions to which they have no right; to make good theſe falſe pretenſions, falſe hiſtories will be forg'd, and fabulous traditions invented; groundleſs terrors will be flung out to operate on ſuperſtition and timidity; Creeds and Articles will be contriv'd to confound all Reaſon, and Teſts impos'd to ſift out all who have honeſty or courage enough to reſiſt theſe unwarrantable encroachments. Devotion will be turn'd into farce and pageantry, to captivate mens eyes, that their pockets may with more facility be invaded: they will convert Piety into Superſtition, Zeal into Rancour, and this Religion, notwithſtanding all its Divinity, into diabolical malevolence. By degrees knaves will join them, fools believe them, and cowards be afraid

of them; and having gained so considerable a part of Mankind to their interests, they will erect an independent dominion among themselves dangerous to the liberties of Mankind, and representing all those who oppose their tyranny as God's enemies, teach it to be meritorious in his sight to persecute them in this world and damn them in another. Hence must arise Hierarchies, Inquisitions and Popery; for Popery is but the consummation of that tyranny which every religious System in the hands of Men is in perpetual pursuit of, and whose principles they are all ready to adopt whenever they are fortunate enough to meet with it's success.

This Tyranny cannot subsist without fierce and formidable Opposition, from whence innumerable Sects, Schisms and Dissentions

Diſſentions will ſtart up their contentious heads, each gaping for that very power which they are fighting to deſtroy, tho' unable either to acquire or retain it; and introductive only of their conſtant concomitants, Ignorance, Self-conceit, Ill-breeding, Obſtinacy, Anarchy, and Confuſion. From theſe conteſts all kinds of Evils muſt derive their exiſtence, blood-ſhed and deſolation, perſecutions, maſſacres and martyrdoms.

All theſe Evils you ſee are but the neceſſary Conſequences of the national Eſtabliſhment of any Religion which God can communicate to Man, in whoſe hands its Divinity can never long preſerve its purity or keep it unmixed with his imperfections, his folly and wickedneſs. Nay, ſo far is the Divinity of a

Revelation

Revelation from being able to prevent its corruption, that it will but increaſe and haſten it; for the greater ſhare of Divinity it partakes the greater muſt be its Excellence; the greater its Excellence the more univerſal muſt be its Approbation; the more it is approved, the more it muſt be encouraged; the more it is encouraged, the ſooner it will be eſtabliſhed; and the ſooner it is eſtabliſhed, the ſooner it muſt be corrupted and made ſubſervient to the worſt purpoſes of the worſt of Men: yet it is plain this Eſtabliſhment is no more than the conſequence of its excellence, and Men's approbation; no more than the alternative of its total extinction, and without which it cannot be preſerved at all; and therefore the corruption of every divine Revelation communicated to Man, is, by the nature of Man, clearly unavoidable.

From

From what has been here ſaid it appears plainly, that all the numerous Evils which adhere to, and all the miſchievous effects, which follow all human Religions, whether natural or revealed, by no means owe their exiſtence to any want of power, wiſdom, or goodneſs in God, but, like all others, to the imperfection of Man; that is, to his folly and wickedneſs, which muſt inevitably corrupt them. It is alſo, I think, no leſs evident that all arguments levelled againſt the divine Original of Chriſtianity, founded on its imperfections and pernicious conſequences, (which are all, I think, that have any weight,) may be proved to be vain and inconcluſive; and this not by concealing or denying thoſe imperfections and pernicious conſequences, as many have abſurdly

absurdly attempted, but by fairly shewing, that they all proceed from the imperfections of those Creatures to whom it is revealed; and that, so long as those continue these cannot be prevented by any wisdom, goodness or power whatever.

Thus, Sir, if I mistake not, I have sufficiently, tho' concisely, answered that most abstruse and important Question, *Whence came Evil?* and proved, that all the Evils we feel, and all which we see around us, derogate not in the least from the wisdom, power, or goodness of our Creator; but proceed intirely from that subordination which is so necessary to the happiness, and even to the existence of the great and incomprehensible Whole. I have shewn that all subordination must imply imperfection in some Beings or other;

other; and that all imperfection muſt conſiſt in the abſence of comparative Good, or the admiſſion of poſitive Evil. I have ſhewn that moſt of the Evils we uſually complain of are of the firſt kind; the want only of thoſe perfections we ſee others enjoy, or imagine infinite power might have beſtowed upon ourſelves; which are therefore in fact no Evils at all: that thoſe of the latter ſort, or poſitive Evils, are ſuch as from the nature of things muſt intrude themſelves into all Creation, and therefore that Omnipotence can do no more than make choice of that Syſtem which admits the feweſt; being obliged, by the imperfection of all created Beings, the untractableneſs of Matter, and ſome incomprehenſible connection between Good and Evil, Happineſs and Miſery, to admit both, or to give exiſtence to neither. I have likewiſe

likewiſe ſhewn that Moral Evil may have its neceſſity and utility too as well as Natural; at leaſt, that if Natural Evils are neceſſary, Moral ones are expedient, to prevent that neceſſary Miſery from falling to the ſhare of perfect Innocence, and to convert unavoidable ſufferings into juſt puniſhments; that tho' the eſſence of all Moral Evil conſiſts in the production of Natural, yet it may have ſome collateral tendency to Good; and that the Wicked, whilſt they are juſtly puniſhed for the miſeries which they occaſion, may probably, by that very guilt and puniſhment, ſome way remotely contribute to univerſal happineſs. I have ſhewn that if Natural and Moral Evils could not be prevented, the exiſtence of Political and Religious Evils muſt on courſe be unavoidable, they being but the certain conſequences

ſequences of the other; that all human Government muſt be in the higheſt degree imperfect, and big with all manner of Evils, being the dominion of ignorant and wicked creatures over each other; that, as ſuch creatures can be governed only by fear of puniſhment or hopes of reward, all Government amongſt them muſt be founded on Violence and Corruption, and ever ſupported and adminiſtered by the ſame vitious and unjuſtifiable methods; that no power whatever can give a perfect Religion to ſo imperfect a creature as Man, either by Nature or Revelation; not by nature, becauſe, whilſt that is human nature, he can never diſcover by Reaſon the truths on which a perfect ſyſtem of Theology or Ethicks can be erected; not by Revelation, becauſe he wants faculties to comprehend

prehend ſuch ſupernatural diſcoveries, altho' they ſhould be imparted to him; that, was he capable of once receiving a perfect Religion, it is not poſſible he could long retain it; becauſe, if it could be kept intirely ſeparate from his worldly intereſts, it would ſoon be neglected and periſh in oblivion; and, if it was not, ſuch a connection would quickly corrupt its purity and deſtroy its eſſence, ſo that national eſtabliſhments would be neceſſary for its ſupport and yet infallibly productive of its deſtruction. That all theſe Evils proceed not from wrong diſpoſitions or accidental cauſes, but ſingly and ſolely from the imperfection of Man; and yet, that in the gradation from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing, there muſt be one rank occupied by ſuch a Creature as Man with all his imperfections about him;

him; that these imperfections must be annexed to his situation, and adhere to every thing that relates to him, to his happiness, to his morals, to his government, and to his religion; that, in like manner, all other created Beings must have Evils and Imperfections peculiar to their stations and proportioned to their inferiority; notwithstanding all which there is as much Good, and as little Evil, in the universal system as the nature of Creation will admit of; and that therefore it is a Work equal to what we might expect from the Operations of infinite Benevolence joined with infinite Power.

FINIS.

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